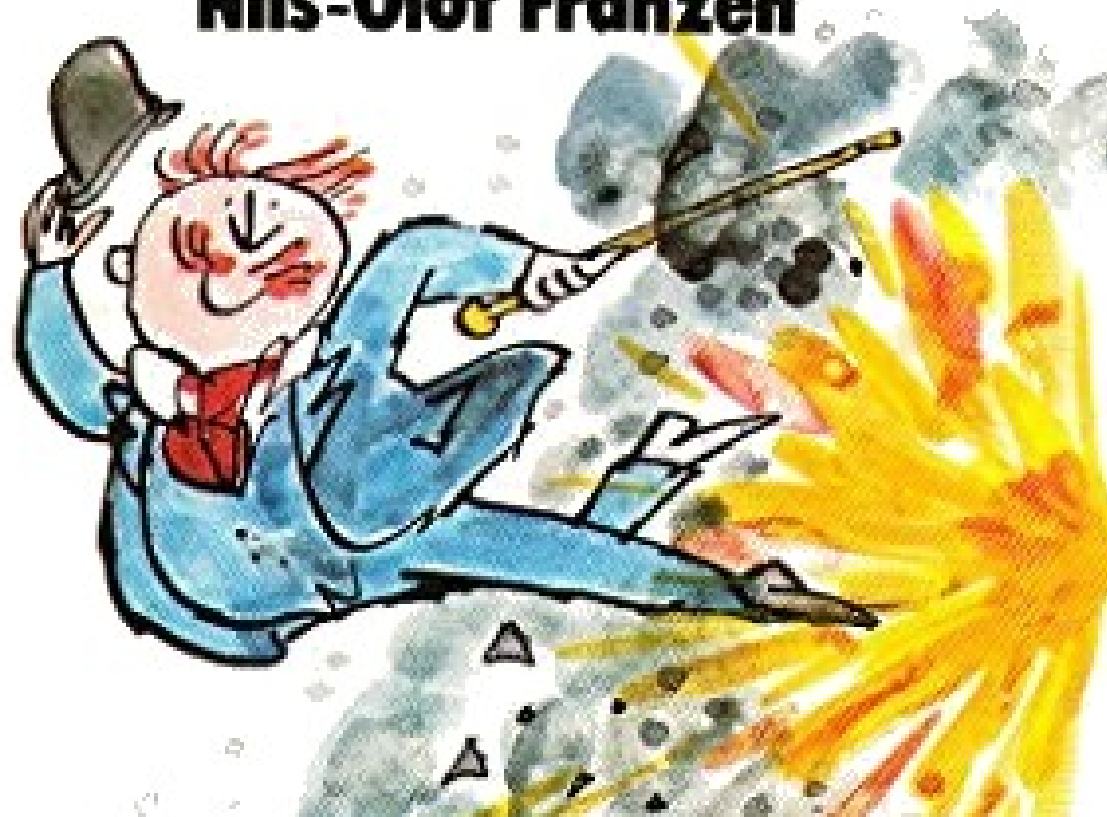


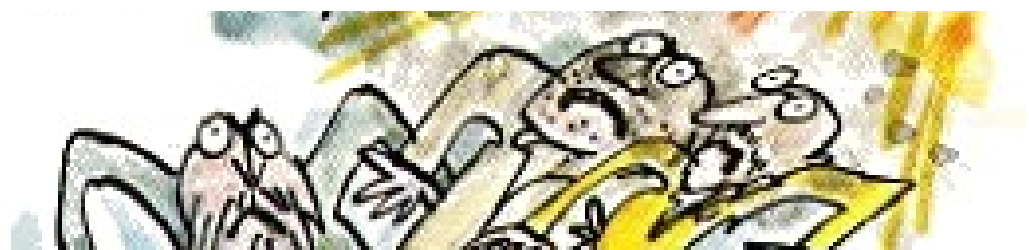


AGATON SAX

AND THE LEAGUE OF
SILENT EXPLODERS

Nils-Olof Franzén





**Agaton Sax
and the
League of Silent Exploders**

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1

An Outrageous Mistake

'Are you Mr Agaton Bax, sir?'

'No, I am not!'

'I'm sorry, sir. You must be Mr Agaton Cax, then.'

'No!'

'Oh dear, then perhaps you are Mr Agaton Dax?'

'Absolutely not!'

'I'm sorry to be so stupid, sir. What about Agaton Fax?'

'Never heard of him!'

'Agaton Gax? Hax? Jax?'

'Definitely not. None of these names mean a thing to me!'

'I really am sorry, sir, but I simply can't read the name scribbled on this piece of paper. Could you possibly be Mr Agaton Kax? Or Lax?'

'No! No! No! Nor am I Agaton Max, Nax, Pax or Rax. What is that piece of paper you are trying to read anyway?'

'I'm sorry, sir, I can't tell you that until I know who you are. Everything depends on that, sir. Are you by any chance Mr Agaton Sax, sir?'

'I am indeed!'

'Ah! I've caught you at last, sir! So you are Agaton Sax—arch-crook and treacherous swindler! You are under arrest, sir!'

'Under arrest? You must be raving mad, my good fellow! I am Agaton Sax! I am the greatest private detective in

modern Europe and you have the effrontery to try to arrest me! I demand to speak immediately to the Chief of Police, who is a very good friend of mine!’¹

‘You’ll speak to him soon enough; he’s the one who ordered me to arrest you. So don’t try any of your dirty tricks on me!’

This shocking scene took place on a fine summer evening at the central railway station in Massovina, the beautiful capital of Brosnia.

The Brosnian police sergeant who had made this disastrous arrest blew his whistle, and seven men, dressed in the well-known light grey uniform of the Brosnian Secret Police, appeared from nowhere and surrounded Agaton Sax, who, although he realized that the incident was obviously the result of some stupid mistake, was nevertheless very angry. He glared at the sergeant.

‘Is this a joke, sir?’ he asked in fluent Brosnian.

‘We never joke,’ the sergeant replied grimly.

‘That’s obvious,’ thought Agaton Sax to himself.

Aloud, he said: ‘I demand an explanation of your incredible conduct.’

‘You’ll have it soon enough, believe me!’

Before he could say Jack Robinson (and it wouldn’t have helped much if he had said it) Agaton Sax was handcuffed and bundled into a police car.

‘To the headquarters of the Secret Police,’ shouted the sergeant to the driver, who let in the clutch and drove off at breakneck speed.

While Agaton Sax is being driven through the streets of Massovina we have a few moments to break off the story and consider the background to the disgraceful event just described. The Brosnian authorities, needless to say, have

done their utmost to hush up the whole affair. After all, no police force is likely to boast that it once succeeded in locking up Agaton Sax. But the truth must be told, and no details withheld, if only to put an end to certain rumours that are circulating all too freely.

Agaton Sax had made up his mind to take a short holiday in Brosnia. He had never been there before, but he had met four well-known Brosnians. Three of them were now locked up in the local jail, but the fourth was his good friend, the Brosnian Chief of Police.

As editor-in-chief of the *Bykoping Post* (Sweden's smallest and best newspaper) he could never risk being away for more than a couple of weeks, since Aunt Matilda, his deputy editor-in-chief, made a fuss every time she was asked to put her knitting on one side for longer than was absolutely necessary.

Agaton Sax had taken his dog, Tickie, with him on holiday—a dachshund of superior intelligence who time and again had given him invaluable assistance in the war he waged against international criminals.

On his arrival in Massovina—ten days before his sensational arrest—Agaton Sax went out for a walk. It was a fine evening and he was strolling along the broad boulevard that stretches from one end of the city to the other.

Suddenly his attention was caught by a narrow, picturesque side-street full of little shops. He stopped in front of a window in which all sorts and sizes of tortoises were on display.

Another man enjoying the fine evening came and stood beside him, apparently as interested in the animals as he was. Within a few minutes they were engaged in a lively discussion (in Brosnian) on the habit of tortoises and turtles.



~ A ? . 0 0

The stranger was a kindly looking man, about the same age as Agaton Sax. He had a neatly trimmed beard, and on his head he wore a woollen cap woven in red and blue, a typical product of the Brosnian woollen industry. Only after they had been talking for quite some time did Agaton Sax notice that the stranger was wearing a steel shoe on his right foot.

Agaton Sax had opened the conversation:

‘My name is Agaton Sax and I come from Sweden,’ he said, raising his black bowler hat politely.

‘And my name is Andreas Kark,’ replied the stranger, raising his woollen cap.

‘I’m here on holiday,’ explained Agaton Sax.

‘Well I live here in Massovina, and I am a lathe operator,’ answered his friend. ‘What a nice little dog you’ve got.’

At that moment a flash of light abruptly cut short their conversation. Agaton Sax, whose ever alert eye never missed anything, spotted a man lurking a bit further down the street. He was holding something in his hand—something that looked like a small black box. As Agaton Sax caught sight of him, he ran off.

‘A photographer!’ exclaimed Agaton Sax.

‘You’re right,’ agreed Andreas Kark, turning pale.

A few minutes later, they said good-bye. Andreas Kark went into a nearby house. Agaton Sax walked slowly back to his hotel, his mind occupied with two important questions. Why did Mr Kark wear a steel shoe? Why had a stranger taken a photograph of them?

That had been ten days ago. Now, sitting in a police car after his sudden and distressing arrest, he asked himself

whether the mysterious Andreas Kark could have any connection with this scandalous mistake?

2

A Deputy Chief of Police stands firm

In a spacious office a small man strode angrily up and down. Every now and again he stopped, apparently deep in thought, and banged his right fist hard into the palm of his left hand, his face flushed with anger. His uniform was light grey and there were six stars on his shoulder.

The man was the Deputy Chief of the Brosnian Secret Police, Mr Piccolo Debile. He glanced at his bullet-proof watch.

‘Damn,’ he muttered, and began pacing again, up and down, up and down.

Footsteps were heard on the stairs, then a discreet knocking on the door.

‘Karabamolosta vari napulikamente permosjenko-vistona e!’ he shouted.

(That is Brosnian and means Yes.)

The door opened noiselessly.

‘At last!’ he exclaimed.

He stared arrogantly at the four men and the little dog who came in. Agaton Sax was not at all embarrassed, but looked him straight in the eye. Although he was pale, he was not afraid, but glared back at this man who had had the effrontery to dispatch his men to arrest him, Agaton Sax, and his dachshund, Tickie.

Deliberately not removing his black bowler hat, he said in impeccable Brosnian: ‘I demand an explanation of this

extraordinary assault on my liberty.'

The Deputy Chief of Police said nothing for a minute or two. Then, very slowly, he approached his prisoner.

'You are Agaton Sax?' he asked menacingly.

'I am.'

'So this is what you look like! You are under arrest...'

'I know that.'

'Don't interrupt. You are under arrest. I need not tell you why. You know only too well what you have done.'

'I protest!'

'Don't interrupt.'

'I demand to speak to the Chief of Police,' said Agaton Sax grimly.

'I *am* the Chief of Police.'

'You are *not*, sir.'

'Are you trying to tell me who I am not—or that I don't know who I am? What right have you got to doubt my word?'

'I'm trying to tell you that the Brosnian Chief of Police is Mr Kossoparamonescono, who happens to be a very great friend of mine. You are a fraud, sir! And I intend to report you!'

The Deputy Chief of Police recoiled at these bold words. For a fraction of a second a shadow of doubt crossed his mind. His superior, Mr Kossoparamonescono, was on holiday abroad and could not be reached. If this dangerous criminal really was a friend of Mr Kossoparamonescono, as he pretended to be, then... then... had he made a fatal mistake? No, he was sure he hadn't. There was so much evidence to prove the man's guilt.

The Deputy Chief of Police pulled himself together and counter-attacked vigorously.

‘We know all about you,’ he said, trying to sound superior. ‘We’ve kept you under close observation for days. Let us give you an example. Last Wednesday, at 16:15, you went to a laundry in Patamottakaraborantamostara Lane. You delivered sixteen white collars and five white shirts. Do you deny it?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t interrupt! Now, what about this? On Tuesday, July 26, you applied for a permit to visit the city of Ritva. Do you deny it?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t interrupt! Your application was considered carefully by the Commissioners for Administrative Delay and finally turned down by the Secret Department for Shrewd Refusals. You see, Mr Sax, in my office we know everything.’

With a superior smile, the Deputy Chief of Police sat down, without offering a chair to Agaton Sax.

There was an ominous silence. Agaton Sax realised that the man in the chair really believed him to be a dangerous criminal—but he was at a loss to understand *how* this extraordinary error had come about. Angry and bewildered as he was he managed to keep his voice under control as he said: ‘I can quite understand, sir, that mistakes do occur, but I really don’t see how you...’

‘Don’t interrupt! I haven’t finished yet, have I? I’m about to tell you what happened yesterday. At 10:16 The Central Telegraph Control Commission received an overseas telegram which was addressed to you. As soon as he read it the duty officer realised that he was holding a coded telegram of considerable importance. He got in touch with my department at once, knowing they would have no trouble in decoding the message. This is the telegram as the duty officer received it.’



He held up a piece of paper and handed it to Agaton Sax, who read it quickly. It was in his own language, Swedish.

AGATON, I HAVE HAD NO SLEEP FOR THREE NIGHTS BECAUSE I HAVE HAD NO TIME FOR KNITTING stop WAS IT TRINATRIUMDORMATOL-HYPNOFORMATOLINSALICYL OR WAS IT PERNATRIUMHYPNOMENT-ALCALCIUMFORMATOLIN I WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE AT NIGHT? stop ANSWER IMMEDIATELY. AUNT MATILDA.

'Well?' said the Deputy Chief of Police, a superior little smile on his face.

'Well?' said Agaton Sax.

'Do you confess?'

'Confess what?'

‘Don't interrupt! As I said just now, we have decoded this telegram. How could you have believed that we would be taken in by anything as primitive as a coded telegram?’

He produced a piece of yellow cardboard paper pitted with holes of various sizes. He placed the cardboard on top of the telegram and moved it backwards and forwards several times, until certain words showed up through the holes.

‘Our message-decoder tells all,’ he declared proudly. ‘Here is what your telegram really said.’

He picked up a sheet of paper on which was written the decoded message his men had given him.

‘Now, do you confess?’ he asked, confidently handing the paper to Agaton Sax. There were a few sentences scribbled on it in Brosnian. Is this really possible, or am I dreaming? thought Agaton Sax. However, he pulled himself together and read the text through twice, hoping to reassure himself that he had not gone completely out of his mind.

AGATON! THE BIG BLOW-UP IS TIMED FOR NEXT WEEK stop ALL INGREDIENTS ARE AT HAND stop GET US SOME MORE FORMATOLIN, THOUGH stop FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS WILL FOLLOW stop LONG LIVE THE BIG BLOW-UP stop TAMLA NUTIDA

‘This is outrageous!’ exclaimed Agaton Sax. ‘How dare you distort my Aunt Matilda's innocent telegram in this shameful way?’

‘That's a good one!’ laughed the Deputy Chief of Police scornfully. ‘*Aunt Matilda my foot!* Ha ha ha!’

His laugh was unpleasant, humourless and menacing.

‘It was the name of this fake aunt of yours, *Aunt Matilda*, that put us on the right track,’ he went on. ‘Your fellow-conspirator who sent the telegram was just a bit too clever—or too stupid, whichever way you look at it. The first thing we spotted was that the words *Aunt Matilda* were code for

TAMLA NUTIDA. And I don't have to tell you what that means in Brosnian—*Long live the Big Blow-up!*"

'I've never heard of such nonsense,' Agaton Sax replied calmly though inwardly he was seething with justifiable anger. 'I demand to be released at once!'

'Well you won't be! For one thing, I want to know the names of your accomplices; I am particularly interested in the man with the steel shoe. Who is he, and where is he now?'

Agaton Sax did his best to persuade the Deputy Chief of Police that he knew nothing whatsoever of this man. He noted with interest that he was obviously unknown to the police and decided not to tell them that he was called Andreas Kark. As soon as he was free, he would settle his account with that gentleman, if indeed there was an account to be settled.

'Well, I must say you're as cold-blooded and stubborn a suspect as I've ever had to deal with,' said the Deputy Chief of Police with reluctant admiration.

'We'll continue our conversation tomorrow,' he went on. Then, turning to the waiting sergeant, he shouted, 'Take him away.'

3

A Greedy Jailer

Agaton Sax was taken to a cell furnished only with a wooden bench and a little stool.

Absent-mindedly he scratched his faithful dachshund, Tickie, behind the right ear, murmuring to himself: 'Even I can't understand this at all.'

The telegram from Aunt Matilda was real enough—though absurdly misinterpreted by the secret police. Andreas Kark was real—but who was he? A secret agent? A crook? An innocent craftsman? The man who had taken the photograph of Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark was real—but who was he and why had he done it?

I've got to get out of here, he thought. Anybody else in his position would have come to the same conclusion.

He heard slow, heavy footsteps approaching along the corridor. They drew near and then stopped. Agaton Sax glanced at the tiny window in the door. It was covered by a shutter. He heard a hinge grate and the shutter was moved from outside, then it was slowly raised. A man with a long, drooping moustache gazed thoughtfully at the prisoner. It was the jailer. He glanced round furtively, then whispered suddenly: 'Would you like a galgomai pudding?'

The galgomai pudding is without doubt the most famous dish in Brosnia. It is served every Sunday in every home, whether rich or humble. It is highly praised by gourmets from all over Europe; in short, it is the pride of Brosnia. Competitions for the best puddings, open to housewives and

professional cooks are frequently organised, and once a year, at a magnificent ceremony the Galgomai-Pudding Queen is crowned. To achieve this high honour she must not only be young and beautiful, but have baked the best galgomai pudding in competition with thousands of others. To be crowned *Miss Pudding of the Year*, is the dream of every Brosnian girl.



Agaton Sax had visited Brosnia before and knew all about galgomai puddings. His mouth watering, he whispered back: 'Yes, there is nothing I would like better.'

A few minutes later the jailer came back balancing a pudding on one hand and holding a revolver in the other.

'That will be 500 *kronsk*,' he said as he entered the cell.

'That's outrageous!' protested Agaton Sax, but having no alternative he produced his wallet and paid up. As he did so he noticed a gleam of pure greed in the jailer's eye. When he was alone again, savouring every mouthful of the wonderful pudding, he suddenly had one of those brilliant ideas which have made him, rightly, feared throughout the whole world of international crime.

He noticed that the jailer came back every five minutes or so to peer through the spyhole in the door. It was now almost midnight. Agaton Sax ordered Tickie to sit on the floor at his feet, clearly visible to the jailer when he returned for another look.

This man is greedy, he thought, and probably ignorant and superstitious as well. It ought to be possible to make use of his weaknesses.

At that moment a sharp thunderstorm broke. Rain fell heavily and lightning pierced the darkness. The big clock in the dim corridor struck twelve mournful strokes. On the tenth, Agaton Sax saw the jailer's pale face at the spyhole again. He had come for another routine check, but what he saw this time made his hair stand on end. Agaton Sax was bending down, stroking his little dog's head, and talking quietly to her in Brosnian. 'We were lucky, weren't we, Tickie? What do you think he would have done to me if he had seen how much money I've got in my pocket?'

'We would have been in real danger master,' answered the little dog, also in Brosnian. 'I wouldn't trust that jailer

further than I could see him.'

With a trembling hand the jailer let the shutter fall. He stood rooted to the spot. A shiver of horror went down his spine. Had he gone mad? Had he really heard a small dog speaking, and in Brosnian?

He leant against the wall, wiping his forehead. He was dumbfounded—but he was also very greedy. Pulling himself together, he lifted the shutter again. The prisoner still sat there, chatting happily with his dog and quite oblivious of the jailer.

'Don't you think I've found a clever hiding-place, Tickie?' he whispered, contentedly smoothing his elegant moustache.

The dog shook his head so vigorously that his ears flapped, then whispered back: 'I know a better one, master. Why don't you put it under your mattress at the foot of the bed. That's where I would hide my bones if I had any. How much money have you got left, master?'

'Just over 50,000 *kronsk*. The police missed my money when they searched me.'

The jailer let down the shutter again, slowly this time. He was a prey to violently conflicting emotions. What was the explanation of this uncanny conversation? Could there be an explanation? Surely he should leave this dreadful man and his strange dog alone. But then he had money—a fortune!

Small beads of sweat appeared on his brow. He paced up and down the corridor, looking more like a prisoner than a jailer.

Finally, at 1:15 his greed got the better of his fear, and he crept stealthily into the cell. The prisoner was fast asleep, completely covered by his blanket, and snoring gently. The little dog was sleeping peacefully on the foot by the bench.

The jailer, revolver in his hand, tiptoed to the foot of the bed. He bent down and pushed his hand slowly under the blanket. There it was. A thick, soft object—a bulging wallet! His greedy fingers gripped it.

At that precise moment, Agaton Sax leapt up and gave a skillful demonstration of the art of jiu-jitsu. Not only had he been awake all the time, but he had been lying with his head at the foot of the bed, and with his hands poised ready for action. In a split second he had thrown the jailer face down on the bed, prised the revolver from his hand, and pulled the blanket over his head so that he was completely blinded. Then, with a flourish he took the handcuffs from the jailer's belt, and snapped them on to his wrists.

‘Now,’ he said pleasantly, ‘let's have a chat. I suggest we finish this pudding together.’

The jailer glared at his ex-prisoner, but dared not refuse. They munched in silence. After a while the jailer yawned.

‘I'm sleepy,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ answered Agaton Sax, ‘you would be, since I put some trinatriumdormatol-hyphoformalolinsalicyl in your pudding. It's very efficient and quite harmless.’

The jailer yawned again; and as he did so tried to stretch his arms behind his head (a gesture many people make naturally when they yawn). He noticed to his surprise that he couldn't manage to do it.

‘Well I'm blessed, sir,’ he said. ‘I am a fool, I've handcuffed myself instead of you! Would you please unlock me, so that I can put the handcuffs on you.’

‘No I won't,’ said Agaton Sax firmly. ‘Instead I want you to be a good boy and tell me how to get out of here without being seen.’

The jailer lifted his already heavy eyelids, and muttered drowsily: 'With pleasure, sir. It's easily done. If you promise to let me sleep in peace, I'll tell you. Take my keys-and put on my uniform jacket; you go through the third door on the left in the corridor, then down ten steps and you will see a small yellow door. Open it with one of the keys. Good-night, sir. Good luck to you. You promise not to wake me up, don't you?'

With a final yawn he fell back on the bed, fast asleep.

How could he possibly have known that his prisoner, before giving him a dose of rrinarrium-dormatol-hypnoformato-linsalicyl spiced with a milligram of pernatriumhl-pnomenta-calciun-formatolinhypnoprobin, had given remarkable proof of his wonderful command of the art of ventriloquism? That was Agaton Sax and Tickie's secret.

4

The Man with the Steel Shoe

Agaton Sax, a prisoner on the run, had no time to lose. He followed the jailer's instructions, and five minutes later found himself in the prison yard. There was a door in the wall, which he calmly unlocked, and then walked out into the street followed by the faithful Tickie. The street was called Jail Alley.

He booked into a small hotel, had a hot bath, dressed, and sat down to think. It didn't take him long to decide that he must start his investigations by trying to find Andreas Kark, the man with the steel shoe. He was now completely satisfied that Mr Kark was neither a criminal, nor a secret agent.

He had to act quickly. It was pitch dark, but he knew Brosnia well, and had no difficulty in finding his way through the silent, empty streets. Ten minutes after leaving his hotel he was standing in front of the door through which he had seen Andreas Kark disappear after they had said good-bye to each other.

He was about to try the door handle, when he noticed a flicker of light at a small basement window, and a strange sound coming from inside. It sounded as if someone were bumping a metal stick on a stone floor. Tap-tap-tap-tap.

What was it? He bent down, trying to see through the mud-stained window. He could see a man moving about in the room. Of course! It was Andreas Kark—he was walking

up and down the room, his steel shoe producing the metallic tapping which had puzzled him at first.

Without hesitating, he rapped at the window with the handle of his elegant walking-stick. The man looked up. Agaton Sax raised his black bowler hat politely and said:



‘Hallo there! Good evening. It's me, Agaton Sax—do you remember?’

He heard the steps again, this time mounting slowly. The man was coming up the stairs to the door.

His face appeared first, a friendly face with a grizzled beard. Then the whole of Andreas Kark stood in the doorway.

He raised his woollen cap, and with a smile of friendly surprise, said, 'So it's you, Mr Sax?'

'Yes, may I come in?'

'Of course, you are most welcome.'

'Thank you. It's important that I should.'

They walked down the stairs in silence and entered a large room with a stone floor. In the middle of the room stood a machine which looked rather like a very large, intricately designed lathe.

'This is my workshop,' said Andreas Kark, caressing his beard. 'Won't you sit down?'

'Thank you.'

They sat down. Andreas Kark glanced questioningly at his guest. After a moment's hesitation Agaton Sax asked: 'Do you know who took that photograph of us?'

Andreas Kark looked at him in surprise.

'No, Why do you ask?'

'Because... because it seemed such a strange thing to do.'

'These are strange times.'

Agaton Sax could not deny it. Andreas Kark shrugged his shoulders philosophically.

'Have you any idea *why* he did it?'

Andreas Kark shrugged again.

'Nihilo peranostra ton ketaston,' he said. (That's Brosnian, and it means no.)

There was a pause. Agaton Sax thought: Perhaps I'd better not ask any more questions for the time being.

Andreas Kark broke the silence: 'Would you like a glass of mead?'

They drank in silence. Putting down his glass, Andreas Kark pointed at the machine in the centre of the room.

'You may have been wondering what that is?' he said.

'I have indeed, sir.'

'It's a machine for changing elements into other elements!'

Agaton Sax stared at Mr Kark, astonished. 'You mean to tell me that you can change elements?' he echoed blankly.

'Yes. I have already changed two.' Mr Kark smiled happily.

Agaton Sax mused: He is only a harmless crank. To change one element into another requires expertly designed plant of enormous size.

Andreas Kark poured another glass of mead.

'You see, I work the machine with my right foot by pressing on a pedal. It wears away the sole, though. That's why I have a steel shoe.'

So that was the reason! Agaton Sax nodded slowly. It was all very interesting but led nowhere. He decided that he must leave Andreas Kark and get on with his investigations.

'Have you ever reflected on the peculiar nature of the atom?' asked Andreas Kark suddenly.

'I have, quite a bit, yes.'

'Then you know, of course, how tiny it is?'

'I do indeed. Microscopic. There would be several trillion billions of them in a green pea, for example.'

'That's quite true,' said Andreas Kark enthusiastically. He liked a man who was interested in his own particular hobby.

'But I'm afraid I must go...' said Agaton Sax.

'The really strange thing about atoms, though, is not their smallness,' continued Andreas Kark, taking no notice of his guest's wish to leave.

'No?'

'Oh no!'

'Then what is it?'

'It's the fact that an atom *has so little inside it.*'

'What do you mean *has so little inside it*? How little?' asked Agaton Sax brusquely. He really was in a hurry to get away.

'Well, you see, an atom is mostly space—void. It contains almost no solid "matter" as scientists would say.'

'This is all very interesting, indeed, but I really must...'

'Every man consists of millions and millions of atoms—you and I and everyone else. And since every atom consists mainly of nothing, we all consist mainly of nothing—of nothing at all. You and I—everybody—all of us.'

'Of course. I agree entirely, But I...'

'In fact,' went on Andreas Kark, his voice hoarse with excitement, 'in fact we are made up of so much empty space that if one took a number of people and squeezed them together, so that all the empty spaces in their atoms were eliminated and only the matter was left—then one could place some thirty or forty people inside an ordinary pinhead.'

'What?!'

Agaton Sax stared at Andreas Kark; his attention caught at last. 'But this is fantastic!'

'Yes, isn't it? And yet it's true—but impossible to do. It will never be possible,' Andreas Kark added with a sigh.

Agaton Sax agreed. He thought what a grand idea it would be to squeeze the Deputy Chief of Police and all his staff into the head of a pin.

'I wish you success in your work,' he said warmly as he bade farewell to his Brosnian friend.

He went back to his hotel through the same dark and silent streets, deep in thought. His position was indeed precarious. He must try to get out of Brosnia as soon as possible. But how? That was the question. Or should he stay on—should he try to solve a mystery which might easily be part of a big international crime?

Suddenly he had a vague feeling of danger. He pulled up, and gripped the handle of his walking-stick firmly. He was sure that he was not alone in the narrow street. Somebody was following him. Somebody was shadowing him.

5

Explosive Machinery

In spite of the danger which was obviously threatening him Agaton Sax remained calm and unruffled. He walked on with a firm, steady step, but beneath his neatly brushed black bowler hat, his brain was seething with thoughts and speculations.

The man, he decided, couldn't be a secret agent or a policeman. He must be some ordinary man, who for some unknown reason wanted to get at him. He might even be the man who had photographed him with Andreas Kark.

He passed a street lamp, and ten yards further on stopped suddenly, pulled out a handkerchief and pretended to wipe his forehead. Actually he had stopped to get a small mirror out of one of his pockets. According to his calculations, the man following him would have to stop right under the street lamp if he wanted to avoid catching him up. He did. He was not wearing police uniform.

Agaton Sax set off again, the man still following. When Agaton Sax reached his hotel he found the hotel porter snoring peacefully behind his desk. He banged his walking-stick hard on the floor, and called out cheerfully: 'Good evening. I am going up to my room now, but I'll be down again in a few minutes for another late night stroll.'

'Very well, sir,' said the porter, politely, at the same time inwardly cursing the nocturnal habits of some of the hotel's foreign guests.

Agaton Sax hurried up to his room, where he was greeted rapturously by the faithful Tickie, who had found the hotel bed far superior to the one they had had in the prison cell.

Through the window Agaton Sax saw the man standing at the street corner, smoking a cigarette. Now and then he glanced cautiously up at what he thought should be Agaton Sax's window.

Agaton Sax had no intention of going out yet. His plan was quite different. He was not going to be shadowed any more, he was going to do the shadowing himself.

When the man had finished his fifth cigarette, he flung the stub down angrily, and ground it out with his heel; then he looked at his watch, and stalked off, obviously furious that he had wasted so much time.

This was exactly what Agaton Sax had been waiting for. Quick as a flash he ran down the stairs, followed the man at a safe distance, and, a few hundred yards further on, saw him stop in front of a dilapidated old house. He unlocked the door and disappeared inside.

There was no time for hesitation. Agaton Sax put his hand in his pocket and brought out one of his tiny battery-operated skeleton keys. Swiftly and expertly he unlocked the door, and found himself standing in a long dark corridor with a pale lamp gleaming at the far end. He could hear the man's footsteps echoing between the stone walls, but suddenly they stopped, and Agaton Sax saw a shaft of light illuminate the corridor briefly as the man opened a door and then shut it again. A faint glimmer remained, coming from the door, even after it had been shut.

Moving slowly forward on tiptoe Agaton Sax soon saw why; a small window was set in the centre of the door panel. Cautiously he crept up to the door and peered through the window.

What he saw was a huge, heavy machine of immense complexity working at high speed, its shining pistons thrusting smoothly and powerfully in all directions—up, down, backwards, and forwards. Whole batteries of multi-coloured lamps gleamed like tigers' eyes from the darkness in its depths. An elaborate system of tubes and containers completed the picture of what must surely be a machine designed to mix metals together, though what metals, and for what purpose they were being mixed, he could not imagine.

Two men were standing at one end of the machine, both wearing white overalls. The man who had first shadowed Agaton Sax and later been shadowed by him was sitting on a little chair, chewing the end of a cigarette which he had just been made to put out.

'You damn fool,' growled one of the men in white.

'You stupid, uneducated ox,' volunteered the other, no less kindly.

'I can't hear a word you're saying,' answered the man on the chair.

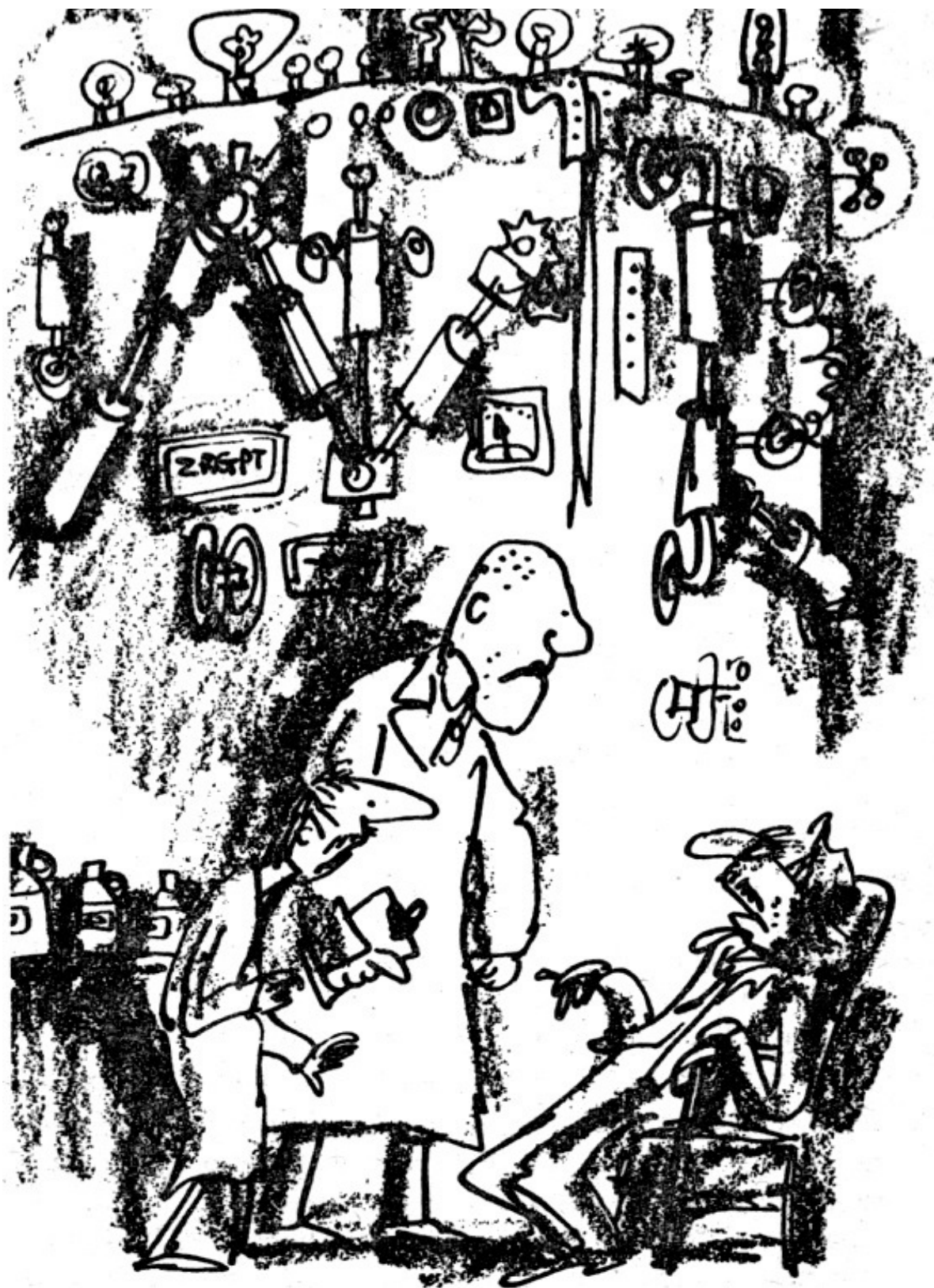
The two men stopped the machine immediately and repeated what they had said, word for word.

'You ought to know better than to let a man get away once you've spotted him,' added the one who had spoken first.

'Your predecessor did exactly what you've just done and he ended up in jail,' went on the other pleasantly.

'O.K.,' said the first man. 'You'll have to start all over again. Go back to the corner opposite the hotel at 4.0, and don't you let him trick you this time!'





This man who had just spoken was tall, over six feet, and had a powerful jaw which he kept exercised by continually chewing gum. The other man was small and thin and darted anxiously about like an uneasy little ferret.

The tall man produced a sheet of paper which seemed to be some kind of a list. Then he began giving orders to the smaller man, ticking each item off on his list as the little man did what he told him. There was a row of metal jugs (like oil cans) in front of the little man; he took each one up in turn and poured the prescribed quantity of liquid from it into a funnel-shaped tube on top of the machine.

'Three hundred and four grams of *tigrium*,' read out the tall man.

'Three hundred and four grams of *tigrium*,' echoed his companion.

'Four hundred and two grams of *crocodilium*.'

'Four hundred and two grams of *crocodilium*.'

'Two hundred grams of *giraffium*.'

'Two hundred grams of *giraffium*.'

The machinery was operating at maximum speed, the pistons turning smoothly, the lamps and wires in the interior glowing steadily.

'Six hundred and forty grams of *bisonium*!'

'Six hundred and forty grams of *bisonium*,' repeated the little man wearily.

(Of course there are no such things as *tigrium*, *crocodilium*, and so on. They were the code names the men had given the chemicals they were using, and they were obviously up to no good. Agaton Sax and Inspector Lispington have strictly forbidden the author of this book to use the real names of the chemicals for fear of the book falling into the wrong, i.e. criminal, hands.)

All this time the smaller of the two men had been pouring from the cans, following the instructions with meticulous care. Suddenly, however, he stopped, and asked: 'Are you sure it's *bisonium*?'

'Of course. What else could it be?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't know? Then why did you ask?'

'Because I do know that *bisonium* must never be mixed with *tigrium*.'

'Who the devil said that?'

'Professor Frank.'

'Professor Frank? Did you ask him?'

'No, it's in his book.'

The tall man stopped chewing. He consulted his list and then shrugged his shoulders. 'I got these instructions from the Boss himself,' he said confidently.

The machine suddenly coughed violently, as if some *bisonium* were clogging its pipes. The pistons accelerated, the glow from the lamps intensified, and the whole machine vibrated as if shaken by an internal explosion. A tongue of brilliant yellow flame shot from one of the many tubes.

'Did you use bisonium?' bellowed the tall man.

'Yes.'

'*Bisonium*?'

'Yes! That's what you told me.'

'What I told you? I never said *bisonium*, you did.'

'But you said it first!'

'You fool! I said *pytonium*!'

'*Pytonium* my foot! If there's a fool in this room, it's you!' shouted the smaller man, holding up one of the cans. 'See

for yourself! It's got *bisonium* written all over it, hasn't it?'

At this point the machine was shaken by an appalling fit of coughing and another flame appeared from yet another tube.

The two men looked at each other, pale as ghosts, and the third man leaped from his chair so violently that he swallowed his cigarette end.

'Take cover!' shouted the tall man, at which all three made a dash for a door leading to an inner room.

The machine was beside itself. Its convulsions were so violent that the whole room was shaking and the furniture rattling. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion.

The force of the explosion flung Agaton Sax right down the corridor and out into the street. But his extraordinary presence of mind did not desert him at this dreadful moment. He managed to keep his bowler hat on his head and his stick in his hand.

6

Wanted!

Agaton Sax got to his feet, very angry, as anyone would be if he had been thrown to the ground by a violent explosion.

He decided he needed a few hours' sleep, so returned to his hotel and went to bed. He woke up at seven, fit as a fiddle and ready for action. He knew, of course, exactly what he had to do. He picked up the telephone directory and turned to the pages headed 'F'. Professor Frank—he was the author of the book the small man had spoken of.

Frank, Anaxagoras, Professor of Blasting Technique and High Explosive at the University of Massovina. 13, Short Cut. Tel: 16 16 16.

Excellent! Agaton Sax ran downstairs, out into the street and hailed a taxi. It was only a short drive. He paid off the driver, straightened his tie, and climbed the few steps to the front door of the Professor's house, but just as he was going to press the bell, the door was thrown open, and a man came rushing out, a shoe in one hand and a big book in the other. He seemed extremely agitated and waved his arms about like a windmill in a storm, as he hurled himself headlong down the steps.

'Taxi!' he shouted wildly, neither seeing nor hearing Agaton Sax, who tried to attract his attention.

The man could only have been Professor Frank! He disappeared into a taxi, which shot off down the street like a cannon ball.

Agaton Sax was flabbergasted. He looked down at Tickie, who had accompanied him on this early morning mission. She seemed to be as shocked as her master—and was just as unprepared as Agaton Sax for the next shock, which was waiting for them round the corner.

It hit Agaton Sax like the barrel of a shot gun aimed at his chest. Posted on the wall of what appeared to be a telephone exchange was a huge poster. (Reproduced below so that everyone can see clearly the extent of its insolence.)

WANTED

TWO INTERNATIONAL MASTER
CRIMINALS ARE SOUGHT BY THE
SECRET POLICE

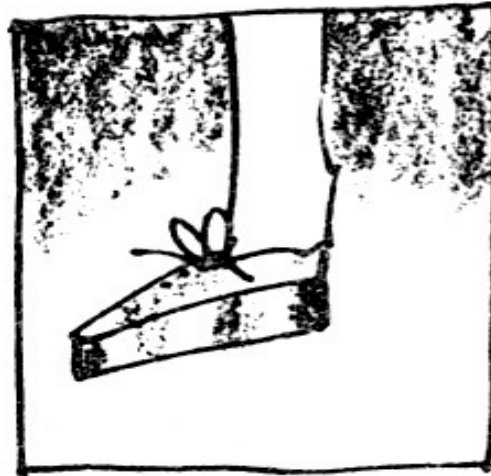


I

Agaton Sax

(Accompanied by small
brown dachshund)

Agaton Sax is wanted for
a number of major crimes



II

A Person Unknown

(No description)

This man is wanted for a
series of crimes. As yet the
police have no idea what
they are. Only known
characteristic: He wears a
steel shoe (which he may of

course have taken off) on his
right foot.

Two rewards are hereby announced:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| I For the capture of Agaton Sax | 75 000 kronsk |
| II For the capture of A Person Unknown | 50 000 kronsk |

IMPORTANT

Should both criminals be apprehended by one and the same person, his reward will be reduced by 12½% on *both sums*, according to the undermentioned calculation:

$$75\ 000 - \left(\frac{12.5 \times 75\ 000}{100} \right) + 50\ 000 - \left(\frac{12.5 \times 50\ 000}{100} \right) = 109\ 375 \text{ kronsk}$$

The sight of the poster gave Agaton Sax a shock that made him reel for a moment; but shock soon gave way to justifiable indignation. His hand closed firmly on the knob of his walking-stick, and he muttered, through his teeth: 'What barefaced meanness. To offer a 12½% reduction on a reward for my capture, I, Agaton Sax! I'll make you pay for this, Mr Deputy Chief of police—and there'll be no reduction on the price *you'll* have to pay, I give you my word for it!'

He looked carefully round to make sure that he was not being watched and then produced a bushy false beard from one of his pockets, put it on, and stooped over his walking-stick. Anyone seeing him now would have taken him for an old man, at least ten or twelve years older than he had been two minutes before. He hailed a taxi, and asked to be driven to the nearest Rent-a-Car-office, where, scrupulously honest as always, he bought a car, since it was extremely unlikely that he would be able to return it after he had finished with it.

His reason for taking this step was simple. He could not stay in Brosnia now he was a wanted man, so the only way to

go after the crooks was to make for the neighbouring country, Merzegovina, and operate from there.

The crooks were one thing. He was used to dealing with crooks. But what about the attitude of the Secret Police? What could be the cause of their shocking behaviour, and what was the meaning of all the bewildering things that had happened to him in the last few hours?

He thought hard as he drove through the Brosnian countryside, and soon had the matter clear in his mind. A number of crimes were being planned in Brosnia, he decided, and certain unscrupulous individuals were experimenting with highly dangerous explosives- The Secret Police have come across what they take to be a few clues (all of them quite probably false), one of them being the fact that I, Agaton Sax, am somehow involved in the crimes.

And the criminals? He knew the identity of at least three of them—the two men in white overalls and the man who had shadowed him. And Andreas Kark! There could no longer be any doubt about *his* part in this thoroughly disgraceful affair. In spite of his innocent and cheerful manner he was a dangerous master criminal if ever there was one! (What had he got hidden in that steel shoe, by the way?) Oh no, Mr Kark, thought Agaton Sax, you don't fool me with your engaging smile and friendly beard.

Agaton Sax's plan was simple. He knew there was a narrow, pot-holed country road which lead to a part of the border where the guards at the frontier post (never more than two or three) were in the habit of dozing peacefully, or playing a favourite kind of patience called *The Brosnian Fool's Delight*. It was for this check-point that he was making, and he was rapidly approaching it now.

As he rounded a bend he caught his first glimpse of the little guard hutu where he would be expected to present his

passport (which he had no intention of doing). Only half a mile to go now!

Who is Speaking?

Then, without warning, the blow fell. It was one of those unpredictable strokes of fate which, from time to time, can even thwart plans devised by a mind as subtle as Agaton Sax's. A blow that can make nonsense of the most careful calculations.'

On this occasion, it was cows. Twenty-three cows, to be exact.

They came from nowhere. They were just there, slowly but doggedly jogging along the road. They were making their way from Brosnia to Merzegovina, a phenomenon which occurred occasionally, when the animals were overcome by an irresistible craving for the grass of the Merzegovinian pastures, which was greener and juicier than that in Brosnian fields. At the unexpected sight of a whole herd of cows Tickie went mad and started to bark furiously, but Agaton Sax silenced her. I mustn't hoot, he thought, for I don't want to attract the attention of the guards. I can't drive straight at the herd, for the same reason. I'll just have to stop the car and wait; with any luck the guards won't see me.

Then the cows began to moo. The leader of the herd started, the others evidently thought it was an excellent idea and followed suit.

The mooing rose to such a crescendo that it woke two of the guards from their peaceful slumber; the third who was playing patience, put his cards down on the table, rose to his

feet, fastened his belt and gave the alarm to the others: 'Illegal border crossing in progress. Duty calls!' They took the weapons they kept handy for stopping cows from crossing the border—long, white-painted staves padded at one end with red felt—and advanced slowly against the aggressors.



I'm done for if I stay here, thought Agaton Sax. They're bound to see me, and they're certain to have already seen that disgraceful poster denouncing me as a master criminal.

In fact, they caught sight of him at that very moment and waved a warning to him not to cross the border before checking at the passport control office.

A thousand thoughts flitted across his mind, a thousand possibilities presented themselves, but he decided the best thing to do would be to turn the car, drive back a few miles and then try to cross at another part of the border.

Just as he pressed the accelerator he heard a loud roaring behind him. An enormous limousine approached at high speed, its horn blaring like a fire engine's siren, scattering men and cows alike off the road. In less than ten seconds the car had passed the check-point and disappeared round the first Merzegovinian corner.

The way was free for Agaton Sax! Followed by loud ineffectual curses and threats from the guards he catapulted his car into Merzegovina—into freedom!

He pulled up at the post office in the little border town of Mira, and promised the operator a reward of a hundred *kronsk* if he could put a call through to London for him in less than ten minutes. Then he bought a juicy bone for Tickie in a small butcher's shop across the street, and they both sat down for a few minutes' rest.

'London for you, sir,' the operator called out five minutes later.

'That you, Lispington?' Agaton Sax shouted cheerfully when he was satisfied that he was indeed through to Scotland Yard.

'Lispington speaking—and who are you, sir?'

'Now, come on, Lispington, don't you recognise my voice? It's me-Agaton Sax.'

'I don't believe it!'

'You don't believe it? Why not? What do you mean you don't believe it?'

'Hold on a minute, will you?'

There was a pause. Agaton Sax thought to himself:
Lispington's voice sounds different...

'Hallo.'

'Hallo.'

'Are you sure it's you, Lispington?'

'What do you mean am I sure I'm me?'

'I mean, your voice does sound a bit queer to me.'

'Never mind my voice! What about yours?'

'Are you really Inspector Joshua Lispington?'

'Of course I am! How could I possibly be someone else?'

'Yet you don't recognise my voice?'

'Who says I don't recognise it?'

'I think we must have a very bad line. But surely, my dear
Lispington, you must recognise my voice now?'

'Yes, I do.'

'But you yourself still sound rather odd. Are you all right?'

'Of course I'm all right!'

'But you don't sound a bit like your usual self.'

'Don't worry, Agaton, I'm all right. Now tell me what's on
your mind. Up to something again are you? Where are you
speaking from?'

'From Merzegovina.'

'I thought so. But that's . . .'

'That's what?'

'Never mind, old man. What are you doing there?' 'I've
come across a pretty dirty racket and I am sure it's being
operated internationally.'

'I see . . .'

'Have you heard any rumours about a gang of rather
superior criminals. They call themselves a league and they

experiment with high explosives?’

‘No, but I'm sure there must be one.’

‘There certainly is, take my word for it. Now listen, Lispington. The gang has its headquarters in Brosnia, but I've had to leave there for a while in order to map out my plan of campaign. I can't go into details now, but I have an idea, and I must come to London. I want to see you as soon as I get there.’

‘Very well. You're welcome as always, you know that. When will you be coming?’

‘I suppose I can get on a flight from here in about five hours, but it might be better if I went to Rent-an-Aircraft and hired a plane.’

‘Very well. I'll expect you tonight, then?’

‘Yes. Tonight, or early tomorrow morning.’

‘You'll give me a ring when you arrive?’

‘Yes, I'll call you.’

Agaton Sax replaced the receiver thoughtfully. He smoothed his elegant moustache carefully and pondered.

‘I wonder,’ he said “ ‘was that really Lispington, or...?’

But Lispington, in London, was not wondering at all. On the contrary, he replaced the receiver, he had a stern and unusually grim expression on his face.

‘You haven't taken me in, old man—whoever you are!’ he murmured.

Agaton Sax got into his car again. He knew that in this car he could get to Rassa, the capital of Merzegovina, in less than an hour.

Ten minutes later, he entered the Mira forest. There was very little traffic on the road, in fact he did not see another car at all for several miles. When, at last, he did see a car, it

was a large, shining limousine, and it was stationary, right in the middle of the narrow road, completely blocking the way so that all he could do was pull a few yards away from it.

Just as he realised that this was the very car that had given him his chance of escape at the border, he heard a most unpleasant voice behind him: 'The arch-crook Agaton Sax, I presume?'

The Magnetic Mr Kark

Agaton Sax was looking straight into the barrel of a revolver.

'O.K.,' he said calmly, 'you win.'

Raising his hands above his immaculate black bowler hat he got out of the car, looking curiously at the man behind the weapon.

In spite of his vast experience of crimes of all kinds, he could not suppress a gasp at what he saw. The man was Professor Frank.

'So it was you,' said Agaton Sax at last.

'Yes, it was me,' answered Professor Frank, a malicious smile on his lips. 'Perhaps you thought I didn't see you when we met so suddenly on my doorstep this morning—but I saw you all right, Mr Sax! And as you are far too dangerous to be left at large, I thought I had better have you shadowed and then set a little trap for you.'

He blew a whistle, and the big car came up to them. The tall man from the laboratory was at the wheel, while the little one jumped off the running-board, ready to assist his boss.

'Here, Beres,' said Frank to him, 'tie Agaton Sax's hands and put him on the back seat. You sit between him and the other one.'

They drove off at once. Professor Frank sat in the front with the driver, whose name seemed to be Tenius.

'Good-morning, Mr Sax, I'm not at all pleased to see you here,' said a soft voice at his side.

Agaton Sax jumped. He had been so lost in thought that he had not looked at the other one sitting in the back of the car. It was Andreas Kark! Agaton Sax stared at him. Then he said angrily:

'You don't think I am pleased to see *you*, do you?'

'No? Why not?'

'Definitely not, Mr Kark! Your double-dealing revolts me, to say the least.'

'Double-dealing?' queried Andreas Kark, a note of mild reproach in his voice. 'Why do you say that, Mr Sax?'

'Double-dealing, yes that's what I said. You told me you were a harmless chemist—but now I see you in your true colours as an active member of a gang of ruthless crooks! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr Kark!'

Beres, who was sitting between them, grunted disapprovingly.

'Don't use insulting words here, please!'

Andreas Kark gazed at Agaton Sax with soulful brown eyes.

'Mr Sax,' he said.

'Yes?'

'You surely don't believe that...'

'That what?'

'That I should...?'

'Of course! What else?'

'Mr Sax, I beg you to believe me because I am speaking the truth.' So saying, he held up his hands. They were bound with heavy ropes.

'You too!' exclaimed Agaton Sax.

'Yes—me too.'

'But why?'



'Because...'

'Shut up, you!' shouted Beres, diving on him like a hungry hawk. 'I won't stand for any counter-plotting.'

They sat silent. The car sped on. After a minute or two Agaton Sax said: 'I must apologise for believing you were one of the gang.'

'It doesn't matter,' answered Andreas Kark gently.

Half an hour later the car pulled up at the entrance of a magnificent house standing in spacious grounds, which included a formal garden and a field with a short runway suitable for a small private aircraft.

As Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark were led into the house, Professor Frank stopped in the entrance hall. He looked as if he were worried by a problem he badly needed to get off his chest. He turned to Beres and Tenius and said sharply: 'You really put in six hundred and forty grams of *bisonium*?'

'Yes,' said Beres.

'It was all Beres's fault,' said Tenius. 'I told him to use *pytonium*.'

'You're a pair of dangerous, utterly incompetent lunatics!' shouted Professor Frank. 'You have wrecked the whole machine!'

He had worked himself up until he was positively foaming with rage and frustration.

'But that's what we were supposed to do, wasn't it?' asked Beres innocently.

'What?' exploded Frank. 'What on earth do you mean?'

'I mean we were manufacturing a high explosive, weren't we?'

'What's that got to do with it, you fool?'

'We blew up the machine didn't we? That proves that we were successful.'

With a terrible oath Professor Frank turned away. Then, suddenly, he swung round and ordered them to open the small suitcase they had brought with them.

'How many have we got?' he asked.

They counted. Agaton Sax watched them keenly. The case was full of cartridges of some kind.

'One hundred and twenty, sir.'

'Good. Lock them up,' he went on, pointing to the two prisoners. 'But remember, that little foreigner, Agaton Sax, is as artful as the devil.'

The prisoners were led to a small windowless room. Their feet were bound with thick ropes, and the door was locked behind them with two

sets of locks. Tickie was allowed to stay and keep them company.

'Well,' said Agaton Sax, 'what do you think, Mr Kark? Why are we here?'

'I really don't know why *you* should be treated in this shameful way, Mr Sax,' replied Andreas Kark mildly.

'And what about you?'

'Well, my presence here is doubtless something to do with my work on elements.'

'How is that?' asked Agaton Sax, surprised. 'What have they demanded of you so far?'

'They wanted me to tell them the secret.'

'The secret? What secret?'

'About my work in changing elements.'

'Why?'

'Because they want to do it themselves.'

'Why?'

'In order to make a high explosive that will explode without making a sound. They have already made one, but they want to improve on it.'

'Do you know who these people are?' 'No, only Professor Frank.'

'How did they hear about you and your experiments?'

'I don't know, really. Perhaps it was my own fault, because a few days ago I wrote to Professor Frank asking him for a chemical formula.'

Agaton Sax thought hard again. He now had the whole picture clear in his mind. He asked his next question: 'Did they say anything about me?'

'No.'

'About my aunt?'

'About your aunt?'

'Yes, my Aunt Matilda in Sweden.'

'No. I didn't hear them say anything about an aunt—nor about an uncle or nephew either.'

'Did you reveal your secret?'

'No.'

'What do you think they are going to do now?'

'It would be interesting to know, wouldn't it?'

After a minute or two Agaton Sax said: 'You see, Mr Kark, I am a private detective. I think I can tell you exactly what has happened so far. Anaxagoras Frank happens to be not only a genuine professor at the University, but also a dangerous, superbly intelligent crook. He's exploiting his knowledge of chemical reactions to further his interests in certain substantial organisations. If he has really invented an explosive which can be blasted silently, just imagine its potential in the underworld of crime. He'll never demean himself by doing petty smash-and-grab jobs in Bosnia! Oh no! He'll go in for really big-time stuff- indeed I'm certain he already is. As long as he plays his cards close to his chest, nothing can stop him from being one of the really big boys in international crime. He made only one mistake, he forgot to reckon with me, Agaton Sax. When you wrote to Anaxagoras Frank last week, Mr Kark, your letter was an innocent request for information, but his guilty conscience made him suspicious. Added to this, he saw the possibility of making use of you and your knowledge. He had you shadowed. When one of his assistants got that photo of you and me, Anaxagoras Frank realised that he could be on to something really useful if he was careful. He knew he had to be careful because he had recognised me and was scared, assuming that I was on his track. He counter-attacked by sending a copy of the photograph to the completely incompetent Deputy Chief of Police, denouncing you and me as dangerous criminals. And furthermore, by kidnapping us, he thinks he has no longer anything to fear from our direction, while at the same time he has managed to alert the police about our alleged criminal activities.'

'Outrageous!' exclaimed Andreas Kark, his voice shaking with passion, as Agaton Sax, with a gesture of defiance, came to the end of his masterly summing up of the situation.

They sat in silence. The ropes bound tightly round their hands and ankles were inconvenient. to say the least.

'Don't worry, Mr Sax,' said Andreas Kark suddenly, and rather surprisingly. 'You don't know everything about me yet.'

'No? What don't I know, for example?'

'Well, you don't know, for example, that I am a very magnetic man.'

Agaton Sax glanced anxiously at his fellow prisoner. Had the perils and the strain of the last few hours been too much for him?

'You are. . . a very magnetic man?' he asked gently. 'Yes.'

'And... how . . .?' went on Agaton Sax softly.

'My steel shoe. It's very magnetic.'

'Oh, I see! And. . . how. . .?'

'Look at this,' replied Andreas Kark, painfully heaving both his feet from the floor, so that Agaton Sax could see the sole of his right shoe, that is to say the steel sole.

Agaton Sax gave a little cry. A cry of surprise and joy.



9

Escape to Danger

Attached to the sole of the steel shoe there was a razor blade.

‘What wonderful luck!’ exclaimed Agaton Sax.

‘Not only good luck—good planning, too,’ said Andreas Kark with a happy grin. Even his beard seemed to be smiling. ‘As we were being pushed out of the car, I saw a razor blade on the ground. I stepped on it and here it is.’

‘Your presence of mind is admirable,’ said Agaton Sax. Then he whispered to his faithful dachshund, ‘Tickie, take the razor blade!’

Tickie immediately did as she was told. She freed the blade from the sole of the shoe with her strong, rough tongue, then stretched her long nose until it reached Agaton Sax's mouth. He took the blade between his teeth.

‘Now, let's see,’ he murmured.

Anyone who, with his hands tied behind his back, has taken a razor blade between his teeth and then moved it steadily backwards and forwards across the ropes tying another man's hands behind his back, will readily recollect what patience, and what control of the neck muscles such an operation requires.

But danger often gives us the patience and the skill we need, not to mention the endurance. After half an hour's work Andreas Kark was free. Two minutes later Andreas Kark, in his turn, had set Agaton Sax free.

Congratulating each other, they rubbed their swollen wrists and ankles.

'The door is locked,' whispered Agaton Sax, 'and they took my skeleton key when they searched me.'

'Don't worry, Mr Sax. I have thought of everything.' Andreas Kark sat down on the floor again.

'Look!' he said, pressing a little button on the heel of his magnetic shoe.

The sole clicked open, and from inside he carefully extracted a small metal object.

'A skeleton key!' exclaimed Agaton Sax in a whisper. In less than no time they were out in the empty corridor. It was pitch dark, but when they emerged through a back door into the grounds of the house, a full moon was casting a pallid light over the field, silhouetting two small aeroplanes.

Two hundred yards from where they were standing, there was a car parked outside a garage. With a quick glance at each other they set out for the car.

But suddenly something moved near the car—a dark shadow came up from nowhere—then a torch flashed and a harsh voice called out in Brosnian: 'Who's there?'

Displaying his usual presence of mind Agaton Sax grabbed his friend by the arm, and they both dived behind a hedge running alongside the field. Shielded by the hedge they worked their way rapidly and silently away from the man; but he was still suspicious and started in their direction.

They were now very close to one of the planes.

'Let's make for the plane!' whispered Agaton Sax. With Tickie at their heels they squeezed themselves into the cockpit, watching the man advance slowly along the other side of the hedge.

Suddenly, there was a deafening roar as the plane's engines sprang to life; the whole machine shuddered violently, nearly flinging them out. With trembling hands Andreas Kark fumbled at first one lever and then another. The plane started moving; it jerked and plunged like a coastal steamer caught in a hurricane—the wheels revolved, the speed increased, bouncing and swaying it turned sharply in little more than its own length, executing circles, first small, then wider and wider. The man behind the hedge cursed, and pursued them with threats and shouts; he caught up with the plane, hurled himself at it, and fell flat on his face as, with a final triumphant leap forward of ten yards or so, the plane left the ground and rose straight up in the air, like a lark rising joyfully to sing a song of sheer happiness above his nest.

Andreas Kark grasped the joystick, with beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead.

‘Wonderful,’ cheered Agaton Sax as they climbed higher and higher.

‘Wonderful?’ said Andreas Kark, his knuckles white.

‘I'm so glad you know how to fly this type of aircraft, Mr Kark.’

‘But I don't!’

‘What do you mean you don't?’

‘I swear I don't!’

‘But you started the engine!’

‘No, I didn't! I just happened to touch one or two knobs. I've never flown a plane in my life.’

‘I see,’ said Agaton Sax calmly. ‘Would you mind if I took over, then?’

‘On the contrary, Mr Sax!’

While they were changing places, the plane dived steeply, but Agaton Sax, having anticipated the danger, was able to straighten the aircraft immediately. With his eye fixed steadily on the compass he followed a northwesterly course.

‘Where do you think it is safest to go?’ Andreas Kark asked a few minutes later.

‘To England,’ said Agaton Sax. ‘A conspiracy as formidable as this one needs the combined attention of Agaton Sax and New Scotland Yard if it is to be foiled.’

‘I see,’ mused Andreas Kark. ‘In that case, oughtn't we to be flying towards the north-west?’

‘Quite correct,’ said Agaton Sax.

‘But we aren't.’

‘Yes, we are,’ answered Agaton Sax unperturbed. ‘Look at the instruments.’

‘I'm sorry, Mr Sax, but the geography of Brosnia and Menegovnia have been familiar to me since I was a boy, and I can assure you that our course is not north-westerly but south-easterly.’

Agaton Sax had too much respect for Andreas Kark not to be greatly worried by this observation. He checked the navigation instruments quickly, comparing their reading with his own observations of the moon and stars.

Andreas Kark was right! Something had gone completely wrong with the plane's navigation system. But how could he find out what? Suppose all the instruments were faulty—the speedometer, the altimeter, the oil gauge? Then the flight would be doomed, and what had at first seemed a successful escape would end in disaster!

He racked his brains. If *everything* was wrong—and there were clear indications that this was the case—then it ought

to be possible to isolate the cause, to find one, probably simple, explanation of the whole crazy upset. Now, what one thing could affect all the instruments at the same time?

The answer came to him in a flash. Of course! How could he have overlooked such a simple fact! Turning to his friend, he asked with a smile: 'Would you be so kind as to retire to the back of the aircraft, Mr Kark?'

'To the back?' queried Mr Kark.

'Yes, please.'

Andreas Kark allowed himself a little grunt of irritation as he did as he had been asked.

'Thank you, Mr Kark,' said Agaton Sax. 'Now, would you please remove your steel shoe.'

'My steel shoe?' exclaimed Andreas Kark, still more bewildered.

'Yes, your magnetic steel shoe! Would you stow it away under one of the cushions on the back seat.'

As soon as Andreas Kark had carried out these instructions the instruments returned to normal. Agaton Sax expected him to return to the cockpit, so when he did not appear he called out: 'Anything wrong, Mr Kark? You've not got cold feet I hope?' he added, smiling at his little joke.

'I might have, Mr Sax, and I am sorry to say that there could be a good reason for it if I have. You see, I've just noticed that we are being followed by another aircraft.'

A Close Shave

Agaton Sax focused his binoculars on the plane and nodded grimly.

'There's no two ways about it,' he agreed. 'It's the other plane that was standing on the runway. It's exactly the same type of aircraft as this one. For once we must hope that the enemy is superior in number.'

'What? What makes you say that?'

'Because if there are more of them in the plane, it will be heavier than ours and consequently slower.'

'That's true,' murmured Andreas Kark, deeply impressed by Agaton Sax's extraordinary grasp of every situation.

But it proved difficult to shake them off. When the Alps, in all their majestic-grandeur, came into view the other plane was still on their tail—far behind it's true, just a white dot in the blue sky—but still doggedly hanging on. When, after flying over the Rhine, Agaton Sax made a steep turn, the crooks executed the same manœuvre, keeping their quarry in sight with a grim tenacity that began to get on Agaton Sax's nerves.

At 6.02 they flew over the south coast of England. At last! Unfortunately their radio was out of order, so Agaton Sax had to look out for a suitable field for landing as he was unable to make contact with an airport.

They came down rapidly, Andreas Kark looking eagerly out of the window as he had never seen the English countryside before. Suddenly he turned pale. His bushy beard began to tremble, and with a gasp he turned to his friend: 'Mr Sax!'

'Yes?'

'Mr Sax—can you make a landing on one wheel?'

'On one wheel?'

'Yes.'

'I've never tried. Why do you ask?'

'Because we've lost the other.'

Even for a man of Agaton Sax's calibre and outstanding competence this was an extremely dangerous situation. Mopping his forehead he took the aircraft up again, a few hundred feet above the ground.

'I've got enough fuel for another ten minutes,' he said. 'What do you suggest we do, Mr Kark?'

'I couldn't say, Mr Sax.'

'What about making an emergency landing on that small lake over there?'

'Oh no, Mr Sax, please not. I can't swim.'

'I see... But I can't possibly land in the field. We'd be smashed to smithereens. How about jumping?'

'We're a bit high, aren't we?'

'Yes, but there are two parachutes behind your seat.'

'Ah, well, that's different then. It sounds a most exciting idea, I'd love to try.'

So it happened that, five minutes later, the empty plane dived headlong into the little lake, while Agaton Sax and his friend fluttered slowly and gracefully to earth, their parachutes billowing above them in the morning sky. Agaton Sax, holding Tickie in his arms, watched little shafts of light glinting as the rising sun caught Andreas Kark's steel shoe.



But by the time Agaton Sax had landed, he had lost sight of his friend. He ran to the top of a little hill so as to get a better view, but

Andreas Kark was nowhere to be seen.

Unfortunately the same could not be said of Professor Frank and his unworthy companions, Beres and Tenius. They were plain to be seen, for they had just landed, and Agaton Sax saw them running towards him at top speed.

Without a moment's hesitation he decided how he must tackle a dangerous situation like this. There was a garage not far away from where he was standing, and he set off towards it at once; three minutes later he dashed into the forecourt, almost knocking over the owner, a burly fellow who eyed him suspiciously.

'What do you think you want?' he growled. 'Have you got a car?' panted Agaton Sax.

'Several.'

'I only need one. I'll want to buy it.'

'They aren't for sale.'

'One of them must be, surely.'

'That depends if you've got enough money.'

'How much is enough?'

'Three hundred pounds. It's a 1929 model—almost vintage, you know.'

'I'll take it and pay cash.'

'You don't imagine I'd give you credit, do you?'

'No, I don't!'



But at the very moment that Agaton Sax was producing his wallet, Professor Frank appeared at the entrance to the forecourt. He was completely out of breath, and almost on the verge of collapse after his frantic dash. He lifted his right hand, and gasped: 'Whatever that scoundrel has offered you, I'll pay you ten *kronsk* more!'

'*Kronsk?*' exploded the dealer. 'Who do you take me for—are you raving mad?'

'I'm sorry—I mean ten pounds more!'

The dealer looked calculatingly at the two strangers, and decided (wrongly) that the one who had arrived first was an Englishman.

Agaton Sax broke in on his thoughts.

'Would you sell a car to a man like that?'

Without answering, the man took the money Agaton Sax handed him.



'The car's yours,' he said. 'you've never made a better bargain.' (Nor have I, he thought with satisfaction.)

Having paid for the car, Agaton Sax politely raised his black bowler hat to the dealer, shot a triumphant glance at Anaxagoras Frank, and jumped into his new machine with Tickie at his heels.

Anaxagoras Frank, foaming with rage, was already bargaining for another car. As soon as he had bought it; at a much higher price than Agaton Sax had paid for his—he set off in pursuit of the master detective.

'That man is more dangerous than I realised, he muttered through clenched teeth. 'We must catch him at any price, otherwise he'll ruin our whole enterprise.'

But Agaton Sax had evidently bought a better car than his enemy. Within minutes Professor Frank was forced to admit that his quarry had got clear away.

Agaton Sax pulled up at the first pub he came to and parked in the courtyard. He made straight for the bar, where he asked if he might use the telephone. A few minutes later he was through to Scotland Yard.

'Hallo! Is that you, Lispington?'

'Speaking.'

'Do you recognise my voice this time?'

'I certainly do, Agaton. Where are you now?'

'I'm at *The Old Sword and Swashbuckler* just outside Pettifield in Kent.'

'What on earth are you doing there?'

'I'm pursuing Professor Anaxagoras Frank and his gang. They think that they're pursuing the, but actually it's the other way round.'

'I see... And what do you want me to do, Agaton?'

'I want you to go immediately to Tinglestone and meet me at a pub which is a particular favourite of mine called *The Goat and Guinea Pig*. It's marked on the map. If you come by helicopter, or even in a fast car, you can be there within the hour. If I'm not there when you arrive, just wait for me. I won't be long and I'll hand the crooks over to you on the spot'

'O.K., Agaton, I'll be there.'

Replacing the receiver, Lispington stroked his chin thoughtfully with his right forefinger, a characteristic gesture. There was a shrewd gleam in his eye.

'Oh no,' he murmured, 'you don't catch me that easily. I'm not going to walk straight into the trap you think you've set for me.'

He turned on the transistor radio that always stood on his desk. What he heard removed any trace of doubt that might have been lurking at the back of his mind.

Agaton Sax, too, turned on the radio as soon as he got back to his car. From where he had parked, he could see all the cars that passed in either direction.

He tuned in to the middle of a news programme. A clear voice was just announcing: 'A news flash of particular interest to all our listeners in the Greater London area has just come through. Half an hour ago, several people at Littledowns in Kent, reported seeing what they believe to be an Unidentified Flying Object, commonly known as a Flying Saucer. The mysterious object emitted strong light signals. According to other sources, the object seen was definitely not a flying saucer, but an unidentified *man* wearing a steel shoe, and descending by parachute, presumably after jumping from an aircraft. If the second theory is true, then the light signals could be the reflection of the sunlight from the steel shoe. Although both theories seem equally fantastic, there is no

doubt that something has been seen, and a telegram just received by Scotland Yard favours the second theory. According to this, the Brosnian police are hunting for two dangerous criminals who have escaped by air, flying in a westerly direction, most probably making for England. One of the men actually wears a steel shoe on his right foot, and his name is Andreas Kark. The other man calls himself Agaton Sax, but there is every reason to believe that he is really a major criminal masquerading as the famous Swedish detective. Scotland Yard asks anyone who thinks he may have information which would lead to the arrest of the men to get in touch with them immediately. Now, here are their descriptions...'

An Unfortunate Television Appearance

Agaton Sax switched off the radio. Almost automatically he put his hand in the pocket where he kept his false beard and dark glasses. He was in a desperate situation and there was no time to lose. He would need to be very quick, very shrewd and very determined now that Scotland Yard, as well as Professor Frank's League, were after him.

Maintaining his usual cool head he disguised himself in a manner most suitable to the circumstances. After only two minutes work nobody could have recognised Agaton Sax behind the dark glasses and the greying, elegantly trimmed beard that are the hallmark of the true man of the world.

Thus attired he waited for Anaxagoras Frank and his friends. He did not have to wait long. He couldn't possibly mistake their car for any other (except his own), he thought, since it was a 1928 model and very rare.

It was coming. Coming rather fast. Agaton Sax let it go by, then set off in pursuit.

But as it flashed past he had noticed something that took him completely by surprise. There was only one man in the car—and there ought to have been three.

He put his foot on the accelerator, determined to have it out with his enemy as soon as possible. When he came alongside the car, he saw that the driver was neither Professor Frank nor either of the other two. It was someone totally unknown to him, a stranger, who shot him a very angry glance and then called out: 'You've no right to be on the road in that car, sir!'

'Haven't I? Why?'

'You ask me why?'

'I do!'



'If you don't know why, you shouldn't be here at all!'

'What do you mean?'

'You ought to be disqualified.'

Agaton Sax frowned, not having any idea what to say next. He was even more perplexed as he saw four other old cars approaching from a narrow side road some hundred yards ahead of him.

Paying no attention to the violent protests of the other drivers he pressed his foot hard on the accelerator and had soon overtaken all five of the cars in his way. Their drivers hurled angry curses and menacing threats at him.

‘Swindler!’

‘We've known it happen before. You're not the first to install a new engine in an old car.’

‘We know your sort!’

‘Don't imagine you can get away with a dirty trick like this.’

It dawned on Agaton Sax that he had had the bad luck to get mixed up in a Veteran Car Rally. As his 1929 model was probably at least five years younger than the rules allowed it was much faster than the others. Unfortunately, much as he would have liked to, he couldn't stop to explain the situation to the angry drivers. He had to drive on and pass them all, which he did as politely as he could, raising his hat courteously to each driver as he sped by—a gesture which they naturally took to be in extremely bad taste and very arrogant. Furious protests reached him as he anxiously held his hat aloft.

‘You are a humbug, sir!’

‘You won't get away with this, you know!’

‘You'll be reported for bad sportsmanship and banned for ever from Veteran Car Rallies in this country. Swindler! Cheat!’

These insults were hard on Agaton Sax, who took a pride in behaving like a gentleman even in times of great stress. However, he grit his teeth and resolved that whatever happened he would carry on with his mission to stop Anaxagoras Frank and his infamous League.

But how? The wicked Professor must also be mixed up somewhere in the Veteran Car Rally. How was he handling this tricky situation? And where was he at this moment?

Just as Agaton Sax was musing on this problem, he saw ahead of him a large, cheering crowd who seemed to be wild with enthusiasm about something. They were yelling at the tops of their voices, brandishing red and yellow scarves and streamers, and a battery of sturdy policemen was needed to stop them from pouring all over the road.

Across the road was stretched a broad banner with the words:

VETERAN CAR RALLY

FINISHING POST

written on it in large clear letters.

And now Agaton Sax realised with awful clarity just what was happening. The crowd was cheering him. It was he and his car which they were swarming over in their outburst of wild enthusiasm; it was he they were now quite literally pulling out of the car and carrying in triumph, cheering, singing, half-crazed with joy. He had won the Rally.

‘Three cheers for the champion! Long live the winner of the V.C.R.!’

This was not perhaps the hottest spot Agaton Sax had ever been in—but it was certainly a most uncomfortable one. A gentleman in a beautifully tailored grey morning coat, striped trousers and shining top hat was standing on a raised platform, where Agaton Sax's ardent supporters at last delivered him. The elegant gentleman was beaming with pleasure. He bowed deeply, then, with a nod of his head, indicated a row of microphones and TV cameras.



All this had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that even Agaton Sax—a man blessed with unusual presence of mind—was quite bowled over. He found himself gazing into the eager eyes of a keen young TV reporter, avid for news, whose words seemed to come to him through a distant, misty dream. Agaton Sax, fluent in at least twenty languages, was suddenly speechless.

‘I must congratulate you on your resounding victory,’ said eager eyes.

‘Must you?’

'Eh?' The reporter was slightly taken aback, but recovered quickly enough to continue the interview without a noticeable pause.

'You must be a very happy man at this moment, Mr... Mr.. Er?'

'Mr Segaton Dax.'

'Oh yes, Mr Dax. I was just saying, Mr Dax, that you must be a very happy man now that you've won the race.'

'Yes, I'm feeling very happy.'

'Was it a hard race, Mr Dax?'

'It was a hard race, yes.'

'But you carried it off at the last, Mr Dax?'

'Yes, I carried it off at the last.'

'And your car...?'

'My car?'

'Yes—what make is your car, Mr Dax?'

'Oh, a...a Tigrium.'

'A Tigrium, Mr Dax?'

'Tigrium, yes.'

'That's interesting. An Indian model perhaps? Never mind... And you were driving on...?'

'On...?'

'Yes, on what?'

'On what?'

'On what petrol, Mr Dax, What petrol do you use when you are racing?'

'Oh, I see what you mean. Crocodilium B.'

'Crocodilium B, Mr Dax?'

'Yes, Crocodilium B.'

'That's even more interesting... An African oil, maybe—or South American...? Never mind...'

The reporter's eyes no longer gazed hungrily at Agaton Sax, as if he were actually thinking of making a meal of him, his chin no

longer jutted so determinedly, in fact, it seemed to be drooping somewhat.

‘And... and what are your plans now, Mr Dax?’

‘My plans...?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh... the League, sir, yes, the League, that's my next move.’

‘The League, Mr Dax? Oh, you are a soccer fan as well, are you?’

Hope returned to the bewildered reporter's eyes. At last he had found a topic that would interest his viewers.

‘Do you actually *play* football yourself, Mr Dax?’

‘No.’

‘But you did play, I'm sure, when you were younger?’

‘No, never.’

‘But you *are* a football fan, Mr Dax?’

‘No.’

‘But I take it you were a football fan once, when you were.’

‘No. never.’

‘Do you support any particular team, sir?’

‘No.’

‘No?’

‘Well—the Bykoping Hotspurs, when I am at home.’

‘The Bike Opium's Hotspurs, did you say? Now, that's really interesting, I must say... Tell me, Mr Dax, are you...? I beg your pardon—what did you say? Tell me, I'm sorry... Mr Dax, are you involved in any... No—don't go—we're still on the screen, you know! Mr Dax! Come back at once, Mr Dax! You can't just run off like that in the middle of an interview! Mr Dax—*come back*, I tell you... come back—you... you... you. . . you blithering idiot... you self-opinionated little mountebank! Oh! He's gone! Mr Dax, my foot! Ladies and gentlemen—I'm sorry for this—but you saw for yourselves, didn't you, how badly he behaved, treating me as if I were a mere nobody. He made a fool of me, ladies and gentlemen, and he made fools of you, too, with his ridiculous talk of tigers and crocodiles and *Bike Opium's Hotspurs*, whatever they may be. But I

have witnesses, millions of them, my viewers. You saw, didn't you, what happened? And when the producer gets at me and starts blaming me for a rotten interview, you'll help me, won't you? You'll write in and tell him how hard I tried, how impossible it was to interview a fool like that who couldn't, or wouldn't, answer any questions. He shouldn't have won if he didn't want to be interviewed, should he? That's all, ladies and gentlemen, this is the end of our report: it came to you live from this year's Veteran Car Rally.'

Agaton Sax meets an English Lord

Agaton Sax's temporary lapse into incoherence, and his apparent loss of speech was due simply to the fact that he had spotted at least three policemen mingling with the crowd. How could he get away from them? That was the question that was absorbing him throughout the interview.

However, he did get away, not only from the TV reporter but also from the policemen. He forced his way through the crowd with such determination that he was able to start his car before anyone even thought about stopping him.

Once more he sped away. Once more his keen, restless eyes were constantly on the lookout for any trace of Andreas Kark or of Professor Frank and his two accomplices

Had he but known, they were not far away. Unfortunately, the crooks had caught Andreas Kark. His parachute descent had been successful until the very moment of landing, when he had had the bad luck to, come down on the property of British Rail (Southern Region) at the level crossing just outside Littledowns. This would have been rather a good place to land, had it not been for his steel shoe, which was so powerfully magnetic that he had had some difficulty in pulling him-self loose from the rail. The crooks, guided by the flashes of light made by the sun shining on his shoe, were close on his heels, and grabbed him just as he had managed to free himself.

As you will remember, Agaton Sax had an appointment with Lispington at *The Old Sword and Swashbuckler* in

Tinglestone. Agaton Sax looked at his map and discovered he had about forty-five minutes drive ahead of him. He was absolutely certain that the crooks must have taken Andreas Kark prisoner and that they would now be circling the neighbourhood in their car in search of him. His plan was therefore to persuade Lispington to detail a squadron of helicopters to patrol the whole area. He calculated that Andreas Kark, a man of lively intelligence, would realise at once what was happening and send out light signals from his steel shoe, thus guiding the helicopters to their goal.

Once more Agaton Sax pressed his foot hard on the accelerator. But, after only a few minutes, he began to worry. What if the squadron of helicopters he needed were not available, or were delayed for some reason? Was it safe to delay as long as forty-five minutes before revealing his plan to Lispington? Of course it wasn't. It would be two hours or more before Lispington could get the plan operational. Then suppose Lispington were late for their appointment. No—he could not risk waiting till he got to the pub, he had to telephone Lispington again and tell him to get the helicopters airborne as soon as possible. Noticing an impressive entrance with wrought iron gates ahead of him, he turned off the road and sped up the drive.

Through the trees that lined the road, which ran across pleasant parkland, he saw the outline of a large house. Cheered by this timely sight, he increased his speed, and as he drew nearer, noticed that it was no ordinary house; on the contrary, it seemed to be an extremely ancient castle, a crumbling ruin which would be unlikely to have anything as modern as a telephone. Nor did he feel that its aristocratic owner, if he existed at all, would be the sort of person from whom one could buy, or borrow, petrol.

But Agaton Sax's first impression was quite wrong. It was a real castle all right, the sort you could imagine belonging to a

medieval knight—not very big and not very old, either, but with crenelated turrets and massive walls rising proudly to the skies, and a moat spanned by a gleaming, freshly painted drawbridge.

‘This is incredible,’ muttered Agaton Sax. ‘If this is a real castle and not some kind of Folly, then somebody must be living here, and there must be a telephone.’

He approached the drawbridge, slowly and cautiously, and just as he was about to cross it, a tall, slim, elderly gentleman appeared at the other end, waving a friendly hand of greeting.

‘Good morning, sir,’ said the old gentleman, pressing a monocle into his right eye.

Agaton Sax raised his black bowler hat.

‘May I cross the bridge, sir?’ he asked courteously.

‘Of course, you are most welcome!’

The old gentleman must have been at least seventy, but he was straight-backed and seemed to be in perfect physical trim.

He's an aristocrat all right, thought Agaton Sax as he crossed the bridge and got a closer look at him.

It seemed as though the old gentleman had read his thoughts, for he said: ‘I am the seventh Earl of Woolverwoolton, and I bid you welcome, most heartily, to my humble castle. Perhaps you would like me to show you round? It would be a great pleasure for me to guide you, Mr...?’

‘Agaton Sax, my lord. It's very kind of you, indeed, to invite me to your castle, but alas, I'm in a terrible hurry—so could I avail myself of your generous hospitality some other time? Actually, I came here only to ask you if I might make a telephone call to Scotland Yard?’

'To Scotland Yard? I say... Of course, you're welcome to use my study, where there is a telephone. I'm afraid it's out of order rather a lot, but it was all right when I used it three days ago. You see, between you and me'—and the Earl lowered his voice to a whisper—'Lady Agatha speaks *much too loudly*. Lady Agatha Knixonbutton is my aunt and she lives here with me. From time to time she rings up her mother and then the old lady (not my Aunt, but her mother, old Lady Knixonbutton) always gives her daughter (my Aunt) a regular ticking off for some trivial misdemeanour—nor planting the bulbs or pulling up the weeds or taking her cough syrup or whatever—I don't know and I don't care, but what I do know is that my aunt gets so terribly agitated about her mother's constant nagging that she raises her voice and answers back down the telephone so loudly that the telephone seems to object if you see what I mean.'

'I do see,' murmured Agaton Sax, anxiously, hoping Lady Agatha hadn't talked to her mother in the last three days.

'Now we'll see, or rather hear,' said the Earl, cautiously lifting the receiver.

'Hallo? Hallo! Anyone there?'

He tapped the machine hopefully several times, then shook his head and put down the receiver.

'I'll call James, he's very good at repairs and always gets the telephone and the speaking-tube working again after my Aunt has used them.'

James proved to be the butler, a powerfully built man with strong hands and a face of granite.

'I suggest I show you my collection of old weapons while James repairs the telephone,' said the Earl.

He led the way to a large hall, where Agaton Sax, on tenterhooks, was forced to listen to a lecture on the weapons of various centuries. Indicating politely how impressed he

was by Lord Woolverwoolton's learned comments, he secretly glanced at his watch several times and breathed a sigh of relief when at last they returned to his lordship's study.

'Splendid,' said Lord Woolverwoolton, 'the telephone is working, and tea is served. I'm sure you will want a cup before you make that call ?'

Without waiting for Agaton Sax's answer he poured out the tea, saying: 'Remarkably fine today, isn't it?'

'Very fine, indeed,' agreed Agaton Sax.

'But yesterday was miserable—rotten in fact—don't you agree?'

'Why yes. Oh yes, my Lord.'

'As I've always said: you never know with weather! Like women, don't you think? Whimsical, fickle—that's my experience. Of course, I've only been married four times, but that's been quite enough to tell me that women are a fickle, unstable lot. Well, well... I wonder what it's going to be like tomorrow? The weather, I mean. Oh, that reminds me—the weather forecast—it's coming on now, I'll turn on the radio. I don't listen very much, mostly to the racing results and the weather forecast. I used to listen to the news, but nowadays it's so bad, really too bad, really—depressing. I don't like it—do you?'

There was a pause. Agaton Sax watched the old gentleman bend over to adjust the knobs on the radio. A soft breeze wafted in through the open window, a bumble-bee buzzed among the flowers... It was indeed a warm, fine summer's day. Only... Agaton Sax rubbed his eyes, as if to remove some foreign body that was disturbing his vision. He opened his eyes again. What was happening? A dim, flickering square of light had suddenly appeared behind Lord Woolverwoolton.

‘Dear me!’ he exclaimed, turning round to look, ‘I must have turned on the television instead of the radio.’

He was just going to switch it off again, when the announcer said: ‘And now, ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention for a couple of minutes? Take a good look at this, will you?’

His lordship took a good look. He puffed at his churchwarden pipe, nodded his head, gave a contented grunt, and said: ‘Excellent! I always enjoy the races. They're the only programmes I care for, except cricket, of course. Just my cup of tea. This looks like a topping race, Mr Sax, you really must have a look. Move your chair a bit nearer!’

He sank back in his arm-chair, sending up thick clouds of smoke from his long white pipe.

Now the picture on the television screen was as perfect as anyone could hope to see.

Agaton Sax turned pale. He stared at the screen. He saw an endless caravan of veteran cars overtaking and jostling each other on the road, cheered and applauded by big crowds lining the verges. And now—now he saw a much faster car coming up from behind, pushing its way past all the others—a small, rather plump gentleman was at the wheel, a little brown dachshund at his side—he raised his black bowler hat to each driver he overtook—now he was twenty yards ahead of the leader—and... and... now the flag went down. He had won.

‘Splendid! Excellent!’ exclaimed Lord Woolverwoolton enthusiastically. ‘What a topping driver! Did you notice how delicately he used his brakes, Mr Sax?’

Agaton Sax nodded silently. He saw himself being dragged from his car and carried shoulder high to the dais, and he saw and heard the whole interview which he had endured only a couple of hours earlier.

But Lord Woolverwoolton had now turned as pale as Agaton Sax. He put his hand across his eyes and murmured: 'No, it's impossible! I must have been out in the sun too long!'

Then he puffed frantically at his churchwarden, shot a suspicious glance at Agaton Sax, and went on: 'Just imagine, Mr Sax, for a moment I thought it was *you*, standing there on the dais talking a lot of nonsense!'

'Ha ha—did you really?' said Agaton Sax hollowly, and with a nervous little laugh.

Lord Woolverwoolton looked at the screen again. His fingers began to tap on the arm of his chair.

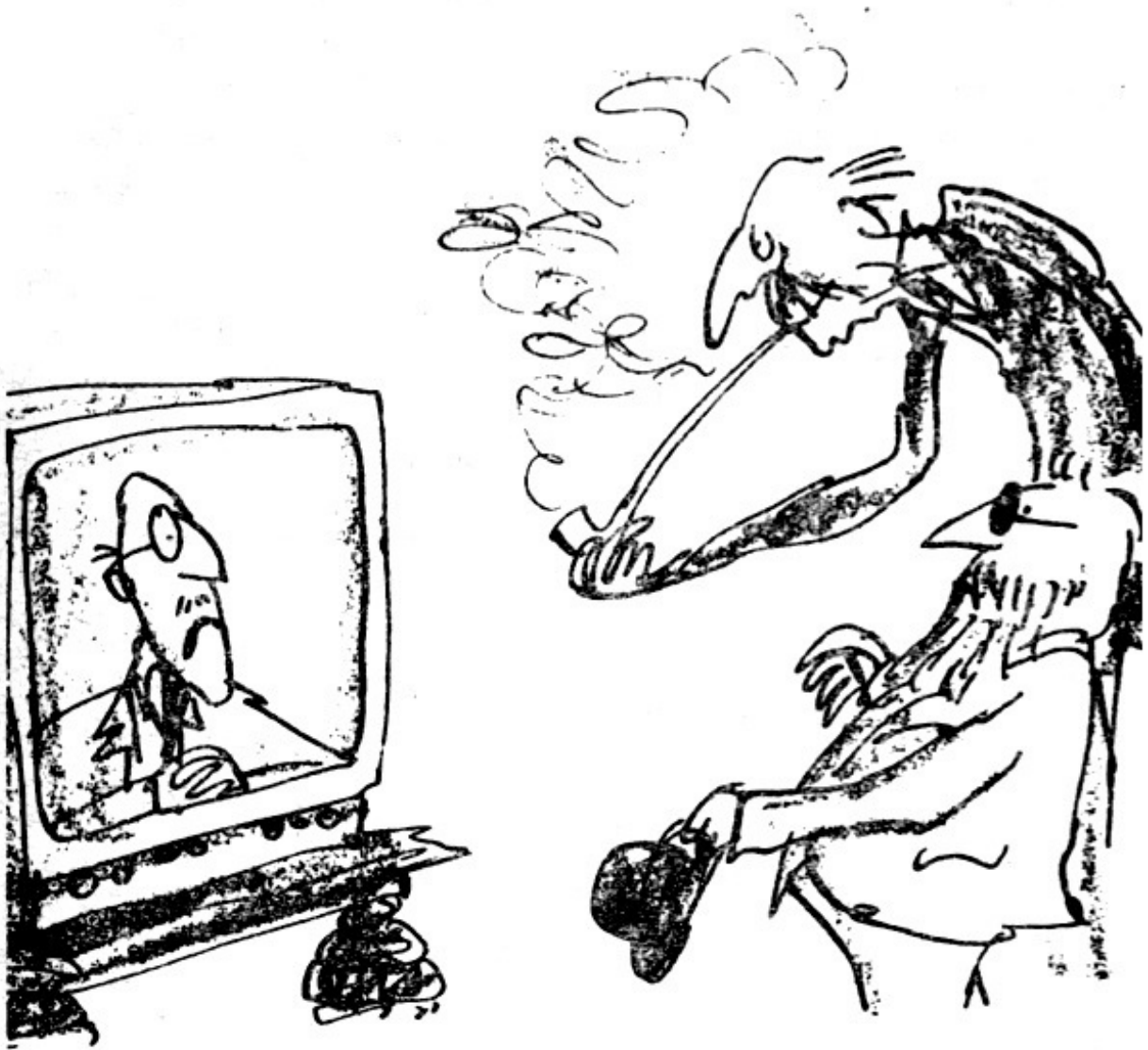
Slowly, almost as if in a trance, he chewed the stem of his pipe to pieces. His mind, under great strain, was obviously working on a problem too hard for it.

Suddenly the interview was over. For a moment the screen went blank, then a face appeared in close-up. It was a very long, thin, horse-like face; it was grim, determined, unblinking.

Agaton Sax gasped. The eyes were looking right into his own, right into Lord Woolverwoolton's, right into the eyes of millions of viewers.

The face was the face of Inspector Lispington. Now he spoke, and his voice was as stern and as grim as his expression.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said. 'What you saw just now was a filmed report of today's Veteran Car Rally. It was an exciting race, take my word for it. Now, I'm sure you're wondering why I am in the picture; so I'll tell you. I'm here to ask for your help. yes, for your help. You—yes *you*'- and Lispington pointed a bony fingerstraight



at the seventh Earl of Woolverwoolton—'You can help me and my colleagues at Scotland Yard. The man who was interviewed just now—the man who won the race on false pretences—the small, plump man in the black bowler hat, wearing an elegantly trimmed beard and dark glasses (but remember they may be false and used only as a disguise), that man is a very dangerous criminal who parachuted into Littledowns in Kent this morning, pretending to be the real Agaton Sax in disguise. I'm sure you're all familiar with the

famous Swedish detective—a very great friend of mine incidentally—but I can assure you this man is *not* Agaton Sax—he is deadly dangerous and he must be arrested. Now, I am going to show you his face again. Don't forget it! And if you see him, get in touch with Scotland Yard immediately! They will relay your call to me in my car, for I am at the scene of action in Kent, driving round in a police car in search of this false Agaton Sax. I am confident that with your help we shall have this dangerous man behind bars in a matter of hours. That is all, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for listening to me.'

13

In which Thirteen lives up to its Reputation

Lord Woolverwoolton dropped what was left of his chewed-up churchwarden, rose slowly to his feet and stared steadily at Agaton Sax with obvious contempt.

‘Well, sir?’ he asked. ‘Do you confess?’

Agaton Sax also rose to his feet. He was much smaller than his Lordship, but when dignity and contempt were required, no one, not even a lord, could match him.

‘Confess what, my lord?’ he asked.

‘That you are the man we have just seen on the television screen—a dangerous, callous crook, who seeks to make a mockery of a noble sport by talking a lot of nonsense about tigers and crocodiles?’

‘Certainly I am that man, but equally certainly I am not a crook. I am Agaton Sax.’

‘Mmm! Well I’ve never heard of anyone with that name—but whoever he is, he is not *you*!’

‘In that case we have nothing more to say to each other,’ replied Agaton Sax with icy dignity.

‘You don’t think I’m scared, do you?’ asked the Earl, trying another tack.

‘Indeed no, my lord.’

‘I’ve shot one or two elephants in my day, you know.’

‘I’m sure you have.’

‘I've killed lions in Uhkbkistan. Several.’

‘Quite. I am not without skill myself in the art of big game hunting.’

‘I'm sure you're not. But that doesn't make you a gentleman.’

‘I protest!’ retorted Agaton Sax indignantly.

‘You are no gentleman, sir, and I'll tell you why. You gained entry to my house under false pretences. You said your name was Agaton Sax. It isn't. You agreed when I said the weather was rotten yesterday—but how could you know, since you only dropped in from some damned foreign aircraft this very morning? You said you needed to use a telephone—in order to call Scotland Yard! What cheek! Oh no, sir, you're not Agaton Sax, you're a liar and a cheat!’

James chose this dramatic moment to enter, carrying a fresh pot of hot water.

‘Do you want another cup of tea before I call Scotland Yard?’ said his lordship, eyeing his victim through his monocle.

Agaton Sax nodded. His brain was working at high pressure. Within a few seconds he had assessed the chances of several possible solutions. By his untimely interference Lord Woolverwoolton stood fair to jeopardise the success of a plan which would have put an end to one of the most dangerous gangs in modern times, Professor Frank's League. Lispington's behaviour was incredible—but there was nothing he could do about it at the moment.

If I just walk out of the room, he thought, his lordship will only have to press a button, and the drawbridge will be raised, and I'll be trapped in the castle. But if I... yes, that's it... suppose I...

A moment later and his mind was made up. He wouldn't hurt his lordship; no one had ever been hurt by a small dose... Just a few hours' sound sleep, that was all. Yes, I must do it, he thought. It would be too risky not to do it, with so much at stake. He picked up the tea-pot, saying, 'Allow me.'

While pouring out a cup for Lord Woolvetwoolton, who stood as proud and silent as a Red Indian, Agaton Sax dropped a very, very small white pill in his lordship's tea-cup.

Lord Woolvetwoolton raised the cup to his lips. Agaton Sax watched every movement closely.

His lordship drank the whole cup in three or four deep gulps, then set it down again. He licked his lips, frowning slightly.

Agaton Sax held his breath. Now... Just a few seconds...

His lordship looked at him and said: 'This is very odd...'

'What is, your lordship?'

'Somebody has put some trinatrium-dormatol-hypnoforma-tolinsalicyl in my tea-cup by mistake.'

'Is that possible?' exclaimed Agaton Sax.

His lordship shrugged. 'I recognise the taste,' he said.

'But then... ?' said Agaton Sax.

'Oh, it's of no consequence,' said his lordship, shrugging his shoulders again.

'Of no consequence?' echoed Agaton Sax.

'No. Trinatrium-dormatol-hypnofor-matolinsalicyl is far too weak for me. I've tried them all, antivigilium-hyperclorid-metamor-fostoamin-perkaminal, somniferom-nibustrafica-ominperk-lorami-dacetani-doformatolin and trinarium-dormatol-hypnoformato-linsalicyl, but I find the only

sleeping pill that does me any good is hepaminal-kameralok-loridormodor-matolinco-macomal.'

Agaton Sax was absolutely thunderstruck. This was indeed a blow! But he recovered himself quickly.

'So you really believe that I am a crook?' he asked.

'Of course I do.'

Lord Woolverwoolton pressed a bell.

'You are ready, sir?' he asked. 'I am going to order James to call the police.'

'Just a minute!' ordered Agaton Sax peremptorily. 'Do nothing that you will later regret, my lord!'

'Ah! You're desperate, are you?'

'No, my lord.'

'Then what is it you wish?'

'I wish to explain.'

'Explain? What is there to explain?'

'There's quite a lot to explain, my lord. For one thing, Scotland Yard has been hoodwinked by three men called Frank, Tenius and Beres.'

'Frank, Tenius and Beres? Who on earth are they?'

'A Brosnian gang that I am in process of hunting down, and which I have pursued to England.'

'What an absurd story! You can tell it to the marines! Their very names prove that they don't exist. Nobody could be called Beres or Tenius!'

His lordship screwed his monocle even further, into his eye, looking Agaton Sax up and down condescendingly.

'There was a knock at the door. James entered the study.

'James,' said his lordship, 'this man is a dangerous crook. His name seems to be Agaton Sax or Hax, or something. Will

you please call the police at once.'

James looked at his lordship, then at Agaton Sax. There was a very shrewd look in his eyes. He bowed, and said: 'My lord, it won't be necessary to call the police. They are already here. They are just pulling up at the front door.'

The anger of Lord Woolverwoolton

It would be difficult to analyse the thoughts and feelings that agitated Agaton Sax's mind and heart at this critical moment. He darted a quick glance at the door. He could make a dash for it—but what would he do then? How could he get away from this ancient fortress with its deep, broad moat spanned by a drawbridge that could be raised simply by pressing a button on the floor under his lordship's desk?

In spite of the fact that so much was against it, Agaton Sax had just decided to make a dash for the door, when something unexpected happened. A sudden draught swept across the room, slamming the door with a loud bang. As a result the wall was shaken violently and a heavy object fell from a hook on the wall and crashed to the floor, landing at James's feet.

'Look our, James, it's loaded!' shouted his lordship as James bent down and picked up a big pistol.

'You had better look out yourself, sir,' replied James with a malicious smile, pointing the pistol at Agaton Sax, who, without paying the slightest attention to him, drained his cup of tea.

Now a heavy footstep was heard in the corridor, followed by a knock at the door.

'Yes? Who is it?' said James.

'Scotland Yard,' came the grim reply. 'Open up. you have a dangerous criminal in there.'

'We certainly have,' answered Lord Woolverwoolton, hurrying to the door. 'I'll let you in myself.'

He opened the door, while James still kept Agaton Sax covered with the pistol.

Three men stood in the doorway. The first turned to his lordship, saying: 'Are you the seventh Earl of Woolverwoolton?'

'I am.'

'I have the honour to thank you, my lord, on behalf of New Scotland Yard. Where is the criminal?'

'There. He's all yours.'

Lord Woolverwoolton pointed to Agaton Sax (who was still wearing his disguise).

What Agaton Sax saw did not come to him as a shock, because he had recognised the voice before the door was opened and the man came into the room.

The three men were not from Scotland Yard at all. They were in fact Messrs Frank, Tenius and Beres.

Anaxagoras Frank was triumphant. He stepped forward and brazenly ordered his two assistants to stand one on each side of Agaton Sax.

'Scotland Yard never takes chances even when success is sure, my lord,' he said with a little smile.

'My compliments, Inspector...?'

'Inspector Hitchuggins, my lord,' answered Frank with a little bow.

'My compliments,' repeated his lordship. 'You've done a good job, and I'm delighted that I could be of some help to you.'

'So are we, my lord. Take the prisoner away,' he said to Beres and Tenius. 'The superintendent is waiting for us. And take that pistol away from the butler, will you? I don't like weapons.'

'Just a minute, sir,' said Lord Woolverwoolton, raising his long-fingered, aristocratic hand.

'My lord?'

'Just wait a few more minutes, will you Inspector Hitchuggins?'

'Wait, my lord. What for?'

'Well, you see, the local police superintendent is a very good friend of mine. A most likeable chap, in fact. You would oblige me very much if you let me phone him.'

‘Phone him? Why, my lord?’

‘So that he can be present when you take away your prisoner.’

‘But why?’ asked Anaxagoras Frank, irritation getting the better of him.

‘He would never forgive me if I failed to tell him what was happening. After all, this is his patch... and... and he has a right to make the arrest himself.’

‘You must be joking, my lord!’

‘Joking? There's nothing to joke about!’ said Lord Woolverwoolton, drawing himself up and frowning. ‘My friend can be here within five minutes—he lives only a stone's throw from the castle.’

‘Oh, he does, does he?’ said Frank angrily. ‘All the more reason *not* to call him, I should say.’

‘What do you mean, Inspector?’

‘I mean that we can't hang about all day. I'm sorry. Come on, boys, let's get out of here. Good-day, sir.’

Lord Woolverwoolton had gone very pale. His tall, bony body seemed to grow, and his countenance expressed both anger and contempt. He brought his right fist down on the table so violently that the tea-cups rattled in their saucers.



'I won't stand here any longer and be insulted, Inspector!' he called out. 'I *command* you to wait until the local police superintendent arrives.'

'You *command* me?' repeated Anaxagoras Frank furiously.

'Yes, I do!' said Lord Woolverwoolton proudly. 'While you are in this castle you obey the head of the ancient Woolverwoolton family. James, is the drawbridge raised?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Good! Now we wait!'

Anaxagoras Frank rushed to the window. He swore angrily as he realised that the drawbridge was up. He turned to Lord Woolverwoolton and shouted, 'Order this fellow to lower that damned bridge of yours immediately!'

‘I will do that as soon as the local superintendent of police gets here.’

Agaton Sax had followed this dramatic scene closely. He thought that the time had now come for him to intervene in the conflict, so he stepped forward, saying: ‘My lord! These three men are not from Scotland Yard at all. They are the very men I was telling you about a few minutes ago—they are Messrs Frank, Tenius and Beres—the Brosnian gang which is trying to perfect a highly dangerous blasting material that explodes silently.’

‘Shut up, you!’ shouted Anaxagoras Frank.

Lord Woolverwoolton looked first at Agaton Sax, then at the three other men.

‘Ah!’ he said. ‘I’m beginning to understand. You are not detectives at all, then; *that* accounts for your insubordinate behaviour.’

‘It does indeed, Mr Earl,’ sneered Anaxagoras Frank. ‘And that’s why I advise you to lower that bridge of yours, or I’ll...’

But Lord Woolverwoolton was as unflinching as his ancestors had been ever since 1066, and if one is to believe the family chronicles, they were a singularly unflinching lot. Not a muscle moved in his lean face, and there was nothing but pure contempt for this upstart criminal in his steel-grey eyes.

Agaton Sax had to admit that the old man’s courage was admirable. What would happen next, he wondered?

There was a sharp knock at the door.

15 Tickie intervenes

‘Who is it?’ asked Lord Woolverwoolton suspiciously.

‘I’ll tell you when you’ve opened up!’ came the brisk answer from the other side of the door.

‘How did you get in here? Who lowered the drawbridge?’ asked Lord Woolverwoolton, astonished.

‘An old lady did.’

‘Ah! Aunt Agatha-again!’ said his lordship, vexed. ‘James, open the door for the stranger and let him say what his business is in my castle.’

‘You’ll do nothing of the sort!’ snarled Anaxagoras Frank, taking a threatening step in the direction of the butler, ‘I’ll handle this! You—out there—who are you, and what do you want?’

‘I don’t like your tone, old man,’ said the voice outside. ‘I shouldn’t be surprised if you turned out to be the man who calls himself Segaton Dax.’

‘Well, I’m not!’ protested Anaxagoras Frank, thoroughly offended by the suggestion. ‘Who is he anyway?’

‘An exceedingly dangerous, super-intelligent crook who parachuted into Kent early this morning,’ answered the voice.

‘I see... Could you describe him?’

‘Certainly, a smallish man—on the plump side—big, bushy beard—dark glasses—black bowler hat. He was on television earlier this afternoon.’

‘And you say he’s wanted by the police?’

‘I do indeed!’

‘Are they offering a reward?’

‘Yes. €1000.’

‘That’s generous.’

'Isn't it.'

'He's in this room, sir! Do you want him?'

'Do I want him! Do you mean to say you've got him?'

'I'll say I've got him! Are you from the police, sir?'

'Of course I am!'

'In that case you're welcome to come and get him. Open the door, Beres.'

As the man entered the room, Frank said maliciously, pointing at Agaton Sax, 'He's all yours, sir.'

The man bowed first to Lord Woolverwoolton, then to—the three crooks, and said, 'I am Inspector Lispington of New Scotland Yard.'

Agaton Sax had of course already recognised his friend's voice, but he knew that Lispington mistakenly believed he was a Brosnian crook. As far as he could see he had two alternatives : either to tear off his false beard and remove his dark glasses—or to go on acting his part as Segaton Dax and let Lispington arrest him. If he decided on the second plan, then inevitably Anaxagoras Frank would escape.

'Ah, there you are!' said Lispington grimly to Agaton Sax. 'You thought you'd get away with it, didn't you? But I'm nobody's fool, I can tell you, Mr Segaton Dax, or whatever you call yourself.'

'You can boast now, can't you?' said Agaton Sax scornfully. 'But you thought I was Agaton Sax when we talked over the phone, didn't you? I fooled you all right then, didn't I?' Agaton Sax was enjoying playing the part of Segaton Dax.

'You did nothing of the sort! I was only pretending to believe you. I knew from the very first word you spoke that you were a fake.'

'How did you manage that?'

'Simple deduction. When you phoned me from Brosnia, saying you were Agaton Sax, I knew that Agaton Sax was *not* in Brosnia, consequently, I knew you must be a fake!'

'How did you know he wasn't in Brosnia?'

'Because he was at his home town, Bykoping in Sweden.'

'How did you know that?'

'Because I had just talked to his Aunt in Bykoping.'

'I see...'

'And she told me that her nephew had just locked himself in his study, pondering over some criminal problem, and he had given her very strict orders that he was not on any account to be disturbed.'

'I see . . .'

'You see that the game is up, I hope, my dear Mr Dax,' replied Inspector Lispington gleefully. Then, turning to Anaxagoras Frank, he added : 'And you, Mr... ?'

'Mr Ebenezer Crank.'

'Well, Mr Crank, I do want to thank you, on behalf of New Scotland Yard, for all you have done. Tell me, how did you manage to trace this dangerous crook?'

But before Anaxagoras Frank had time to answer Lispington's question, Lord Woolverwoolton, who had been listening with a deepening frown to this conversation, suddenly stepped forward, raising his hand in a gesture that demanded silence. Just a minute, Inspector Lispington. I'm afraid there's something fishy going on here, as my Aunt Agatha would say.'

'What do you mean *fishy*, sir?' said Lispington curtly.

'Well, that man over there'- pointing at Anaxagoras Frank —

'I don't like him.'

'You don't like him?'

'No, I don't.'

'Why not?'

'I don't trust him.'

'You don't trust him? Why ever...'

'And that man over there'—pointing at Agaton Sax—'I like him.'

'You like him. Do you know him, then?'

‘No.’

‘But you like him even though you don't know him. How do you account for that, sir?’

‘Well, you see, Inspector Flispinton, I just know I can trust him.’

‘You can trust him!’

Lispington shook his head pityingly, and Anaxagoras Frank's lips curved in a contemptuous smile.

‘Inspector Lispington,’ he said brusquely, ‘I suggest we conclude this ridiculous conversation about likes and dislikes. I could easily join in with a lot of damn silly dislikes of my own, but as we're all pressed for time I'll refrain. Wouldn't it be better if you just put an end to all this clap-trap and asked Woolingwooling to stop messing about and lower that *fishy* old drawbridge of his?’

Lispington turned to Lord Woolverwoolton.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘I would be very much obliged if you would lower the drawbridge for us. I imagine it can be done quite simply by merely pressing a button.’

Lord Woolverwoolton eyed him haughtily.

‘Is this an order from the police, Inspector Mystington?’ he asked.

‘Well, you could put it that way, sir.’

‘Then it is my duty to tell you that no Woolverwoolton has ever pressed a button at another man's command.’

‘I've had about enough of this nonsense!’ shouted Anaxagoras Frank.

Then, before anyone could stop him, the Earl suddenly crossed the room to where Agaton Sax was standing, raised his right hand and snatched the beard and dark glasses from his face.



'Look for yourselves!' his lordship called out. 'Look at his *real* face! That's not the face of a crook, it's the face of an intelligent, honest man, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself Inspector Grispington, to put your trust in that rascal who calls himself Ebenezer Crank and not in this honest and respectable gentleman.'

'Agaton!' exclaimed Lispington with a gasp. 'What on earth are you doing here?'

'Right now I'm waiting for you to arrest Mr Anaxagoras Frank.'
Lispington turned to Frank.

'So you're Frank, are you? You are under arrest, Mr Frank!'

'Are you trying to be funny?' retorted Anaxagoras Frank insolently, calmly indicating, with a nod of his head, the antique pistol Beres was holding in his hand. 'Isn't it about time you lowered that drawbridge?'

Agaton Sax had a sudden feeling that, while the men had been talking, something else had happened, but he couldn't be sure what.

Then he realised. Tickie had disappeared. She must have slipped through the door when it was opened to let Lispington in. The door was still ajar.

Agaton Sax drew in his breath. There she was, waddling in through the door, wagging her tail cheerfully and looking up at Agaton Sax as she came towards him. She was carrying something in her mouth, something which sent an icy chill down Agaton Sax's spine. Deathly white, he turned to face everyone in the room, and said, 'Mr Frank... And all of you . . . Don't move!'

'What is it now?' snarled Anaxagoras Frank.

'Mr Frank,' said Agaton Sax, 'if you look carefully you will see that my dog is holding something in her mouth. Do you know what it is?'

'I don't know and I don't care!'

'You don't. Perhaps you will, Mr Frank, when I tell you that it's one of your own highly explosive tigrum cartridges!'



Record-breaking Leaps

Anaxagoras Frank flinched and threw his hands above his head, as if to say '*it can't be!*' But he saw at once that Agaton Sax was right. He knew that the little brown dog was holding in her mouth a threat of death to each and every one of them... If it should enter the dog's head to drop the cartridge on the floor at his master's feet, or start chewing it, then...

Trembling in every limb, Anaxagoras Frank croaked: 'Get it away from the dog! But be careful!'

'I'll be very careful, Mr Frank, but the first move is yours.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that you must first order your charming assistant, Mr Beres, to hand his pistol over to me.'

'Give it to him!' hissed Anaxagoras Frank nervously, and Beres handed the weapon to Agaton Sax with alacrity.

'Thank you,' said the master detective calmly. Then, bending down, he whispered gently in Tickie's ear. Immediately she allowed him to take the cartridge from between her teeth.

'So, Mr Frank, you do have bad luck! What a pity that you were careless enough to leave the suitcase full of your precious cartridges on the ground outside the door so that my intelligent dachshund had no difficulty in picking one up and bringing it to her master.'

Lord Woolverwoolton nodded approvingly, and said, 'Just a minute-I think this calls for a. . .'

What it called for, was never known for Anaxagoras Frank made one last effort, acting with formidable swiftness. Before any of the others had time to intervene, he made a tremendous leap from where he stood right across to the window, which he crashed recklessly through, disappearing in a dazzling explosion of glass splinters.



(This gigantic leap still stands in *Scotland Yard's Book of Records* as the longest and most daring ever to be made in

an escape attempt. It beat by three inches the former record-breaking leap made by the notorious pickpocket, Slim Slickendale who, on the afternoon of 20th August, 1867, made a similar dive through a window and vanished for ever. He had been able to take the police by surprise because they were in the habit of running him in for questioning about petty larcenies in the Whitechapel area every Wednesday afternoon, a procedure that he apparently quite enjoyed, until that fatal afternoon when he proved he had had enough.)

Anaxagoras Frank's leap was later measured, and found to be fifteen feet, four inches.

Agaton Sax's leap through the broken window in pursuit of Anaxagoras Frank was just as spectacular, but, of course, detectives get no recognition for their achievements in *Scotland Yard's Book of Records*. He saw Frank run towards the moat, then throw himself head long into the water. Agaton Sax did not hesitate. He was only five or six yards behind his enemy, who was cutting his way through the water with a powerful crawl. In fact, Professor Frank had been an outstanding amateur swimmer before starting to explore the deep waters of international crime. But Agaton Sax was inferior to no one, whether on land or sea, and he slowly but steadily reduced the distance between himself and Anaxagoras Frank.

Suddenly a strange scene caught his eye. On the other side of the moat two people were engaged in a violent quarrel. One of them was a thin old lady carrying an umbrella in her right hand and a string-bag in her left. She was shaking the umbrella at a man, who was trying in vain to make her see his point of view.

'Can't you understand plain English?' the old lady shouted angrily. 'Can't you understand, you are treading on my flower-bed?'

'Tjep?'

'Don't play the fool with me!'

"Tjep?'

'Don't talk Double Dutch to me. Pretending you can't speak English won't help at all because I don't believe it.'

'Nakamassarassa—brodkos?'

'Don't think I didn't see you treading on my begonias, because I did.'

'Tjep begonias-karnokros?'

'And why aren't you dressed properly? Why can't you wear decent shoes?'

The man was, of course, Andreas Kark, who had managed to free himself while the crooks were busy in the castle. The lady was obviously Lady Agatha Knixonbutton, who had been locked out of the castle grounds, so to speak, since her nephew, the Earl, flatly refused to lower the drawbridge for the crooks.

Agaton Sax was genuinely happy to see that his friend, Andreas Kark, had managed to regain his freedom, but he had no time to rejoice. At the moment all that mattered was capturing Anaxagoras Frank. The arch crook, having reached the far bank of the moat, heaved himself out of the water only to find Lady Agatha barring his way. She stared at him, her umbrella raised in self-defence.

'*Who* are you? How dare you go for a swim in my nephew's moat!'

'Tjip!' panted Anaxagoras Frank, pushing her roughly aside and racing off to his car, which was parked some twenty yards away.



'Who are *you*?' she shouted, once more brandishing, her umbrella, but Agaton Sax had no time to answer, even though the question was a reasonable one. He merely raised his bowler hat in deference to the lady and darted off in pursuit of Anaxagoras Frank.

Every second was now worth its weight in gold. With incredible speed, Anaxagoras Frank had reached his car—dived behind the wheel and, leering triumphantly, started the engine.

Agaton Sax managed an even greater burst of speed. Relying on his experience as a sprinter he calculated that it would take him five seconds to reach Frank's car. He leapt on the running-board just as the car started to move.

'Out of my way, fatty!' shouted Frank, jerking the car forward in an effort to make Agaton Sax lose his balance and fall to the ground.

But Agaton Sax was far too agile to be caught by a simple trick like that. He made another leap, as handsome as his earlier one through the window, and landed in the car, comfortably on the back-seat. Just as he did so, Anaxagoras Frank jerked the car violently forward again, but this time something went wrong with his steering and he almost drove straight into the moat. Something had dazzled him, and whichever way he looked, he found he could not get away from the blinding glare, although he had no idea what was causing it. He swore furiously at Agaton Sax, cursing him right, left and centre on the very natural assumption that it was the Swedish detective who, by some dirty trick, was causing the trouble. In fact, it was Andreas Kark, sitting on the ground a few yards away, and moving his steel shoe here and there so the shafts of sunlight reflected from it shot like darts into Anaxagoras Frank's eyes. This was a secret weapon that neither Frank nor anyone else had ever thought of before; in a dangerous situation like the one that faced Agaton Sax now it was simple but most efficient.

But Frank was nothing if not cunning. Once again he made a spectacular leap; this time out of his own car, across the road, and into Agaton Sax's, which was parked some fifteen yards away.

This time he was even quicker than Agaton Sax, who had the bad luck to be dazzled by Andreas Kark just as he jumped out in pursuit. He missed his own car by three inches and saw a vicious, scornful smile on Anaxagoras Frank's lips

as the cunning rascal whirled away in a thick cloud of grey dust.

But Frank's car was still there, and even if it was slower than Agaton Sax's excellent vintage model, it could certainly be used for the first part of the chase.

'Sorry, I can't take you with me,' he called to Andreas Kark, who was waving his hand at him.

'But you must take *me!*' rang out a familiar voice from behind one of the trees in the park.

Lispington! Of course, Agaton Sax couldn't possibly leave him behind.

'What happened to the rest of them?' asked Agaton Sax as he pressed his foot down hard on the accelerator.

'They've been taken care of,' panted Lispington, who was quite out of breath after his run. 'That Earl—Will-of-the-Woolton I think his name is—has locked them up in one of his dungeons until the local superintendent of police arrives.'

Veterans to the Rescue

We must now turn our attention once more to Anaxagoras Frank. Chewing on the stump of a cheap Brosnian cigar, he drove off in Agaton Sax's car; his mood one of exulting pride. He had at last shaken off that ridiculous, boastful, little quack who believed he could put a stop to the career of Anaxagoras Frank! What a presumptuous little fool he was, strutting about like a peacock. He didn't seem to realise that nothing could stop Anaxagoras Frank now! He was on his way to London, and within two hours he would be presiding over an extremely important Board meeting of the secret international league whose president he was, and whose aim was to exploit his extraordinary invention—the discovery of an explosive compound which could be detonated without making a sound. His cool financial brain was eagerly anticipating the huge deals that his invention would make possible, and he had already decided what he would do with all the money that would pour into his capacious pockets. He would lead a life of great splendour and luxury; he would have sixteen servants—seven cars, maybe eight—a vast palace on the Riviera with five swimming-pools and four tennis courts...

He leaned back in the driver's seat, enjoying the prospect of his magnificent future and pulled deeply on his cigar. Through the smoke haze his keen eye spotted a little cloud of dust on the road about half a mile ahead. He frowned, and peered more closely at the cloud as he drew nearer to it.

It was, of course, a car—no, it was two cars—no, it wasn't, it was three, four, five, six cars! Perhaps more than six.

Anaxagoras Frank stifled an oath. 'What on earth was going on?

Suddenly he understood, and turned as white as a sheet. At the same moment, the drivers of the other cars recognised him—or rather the car he was driving. Furious insults were hurled at him, drivers rose in their seats shaking their fists at him.

'There he is again! He's got a new disguise, but he's still the same dirty swindler!'

'Don't let him get away with it this time!'

'Force him into the ditch!'

'He's a disgrace to the noble sport of Veteran Car Racing.'

'We'll drag him before our Disciplinary Court.'

'Let's surround him!'

Anaxagoras Frank had witnessed Agaton Sax's performance on the dais a couple of hours ago, so he realised that the angry drivers had mistaken him for the Swedish detective. As a man used to dangerous situations calling for quick action, he knew what to do. He swung the car round in a U turn, even though this meant running the risk of being confronted by Agaton Sax again—but he took the risk since he had noticed a crossroads a hundred yards or so behind which might lead him away from this dangerous area where he was being pursued on all sides.

Meanwhile Agaton Sax had suffered a breakdown which had brought his car—that is Anaxagoras Frank's car—to a stop right in the middle of the crossroads. He jumped out of the car, lifted the bonnet and gazed despairingly into the engine, which was spluttering and coughing as if it had a bad attack of bronchial asthma. Agaton Sax was an expert in engines of all kinds, but this car was so old that he had never seen an engine like it.

He heard a voice hailing them from one of the roads approaching the crossroads. 'Who's coming?' he asked Lispington.

Shading his eyes with his right hand, Lispington answered: 'It looks like Lord Woolverwoolton.'

It was indeed the Earl, struggling bravely along the road, and waving at Lispington, who was sitting on the running board, fanning himself with his hat. Agaton Sax, defeated by the engine he was peering at, enquired anxiously of Lispington: 'Do you know anything about the Robson Sports, 1925 model?'

'Do I? Sorry, old man, absolutely nothing at all. What's wrong with it?'

'That's what I want to know!' answered Agaton Sax testily.

'No, I'm sorry, Agaton, this car is before my time.'

Lord Woolverwoolton had now joined them. He could certainly cover the ground remarkably fast considering he was seventy-four years old. He greeted Agaton Sax with a friendly wave of his hand.

'Hallo, Mr Sax, glad to see you again! He got away, did he?'

'Only temporarily, my lord,' said Agaton Sax grimly. 'Do you know anything about old cars?'

The Earl nodded thoughtfully.

'That depends how old the car is,' he said.

'It's a Robson, 1925.'

'1925? Oh no, I'm sorry, that's far too young for me.'

With a little sigh Agaton Sax dived into the engine again, but just as he thought he had traced the trouble, he heard Lispington shouting excitedly.

'The veteran car mob—they are coming our way!'

They were indeed—and making plenty of noise as they came. Evidently the first car was being chased by the rest; Agaton Sax had no difficulty in identifying the first car and its disagreeable driver.

'I wonder...' he murmured to himself. Then, turning to Lord Woolverwoolton, he asked: 'Where does the road that goes off to the right lead to?'

'Back here,' said the Earl.

'Back here? How do you mean?'

'You see the other road, the one to the left over there?'

'Yes.'

'Well, it's the same road.'

'How do you mean?'

'Both roads go in a wide circle round the castle, or, if you prefer, they are the same road; it starts on this side of the main road, goes round the castle, and leads back to the far side of the main road.'

'I see... Now, that's splendid! My lord—Lispington—will you give me a hand?'

Joining forces they managed to push the old car across the main road, blocking the way for all traffic.

'Now, please, put these yellow arm bands on your right arms—and you'll look like traffic wardens. That's fine, oh yes, this is going to work beautifully.'

'We are going to stop them, aren't we?' said Lispington suspiciously.

'No, we're not. Absolutely not! I'm going to hide behind this car, while you and Lord Woolverwoolton direct all the cars on to the left-hand road. A very simple plan, you see, with no problems.'



'But, Agaton, you can't let him get away like this!'

'Don't worry, Lispington, I know exactly what I'm doing.'

Anaxagoras Frank's car was approaching at approximately forty miles an hour. When he caught sight of the car parked right across the road, he got so furious that he rose in his seat, shaking the wheel, swearing, blustering, and hurling insults at the two men. But when, with-a friendly wave of the hand, they

directed him to the road on the right of the crossroads, he thought that they were traffic wardens, on duty for the Veteran Car Rally, so, without hesitation, he turned to the right.

The other cars were some thirty yards behind. They received the same friendly instructions and, consequently, also turned to the right.

'Well done,' said Agaton Sax, popping up from behind the car and puffing leisurely at the pipe which he had just found time to light.

'Now what?' asked Lispington.

'Well, I would like you to be kind enough to go on playing your parts as traffic wardens for another fifteen minutes or so,' said Agaton Sax.

'Why, yes... of course... The cars will soon come back along the road to the left. I should say the whole tour round the castle and back here will take them about four minutes.' said Lord Woolverwoolton.

'Excellent,' said Agaton Sax.

'But...?' said Lispington.

'Yes! Why?' asked the Earl.

'It's all very simple,' said Agaton Sax. 'I remembered the rules you see.'

'The rules?'

'Yes. I'm not altogether unfamiliar with Veteran Car races, and there seems to be at least one important rule common to them all. The paragraph relating to that rule always reads something like this: 'On no account must an accredited Veteran Car Rally driver interrupt the race by stopping his car (unless compelled to do so by circumstances over which he has no control). If he does, he shall be disqualified from this and all subsequent Veteran Car Rallies.'

'But the Rally's over!' exclaimed Lord Woolverwoolton.

'Oh no it's not! The race hasn't finished yet,'replied Agaton Sax.

'But you won it!'

'No, I didn't, my lord. The umpires realised that the whole thing had been a mistake—I was not entered for the Rally, I had not paid the registration fee, I was not even a member of the Veteran Car Rally Drivers' Club. So they had to start all over again after I had left the dais at the end of the television interview.'

'This is far too complicated for me,' said the Earl, shaking his head. 'I don't understand it, and I'm not sure that I'd like it if I did. Why should they drive round the castle? It's the first time in recorded history that our ancient stronghold has been encircled by strangers or enemies.'

'I sympathise with your disapproval, my lord. But I assure you that by co-operating in this plan, you will make an important contribution to the seizure of one of the most dangerous criminals in modern times,' said Agaton Sax solemnly.

'Hear hear,' echoed Lispington, approvingly.

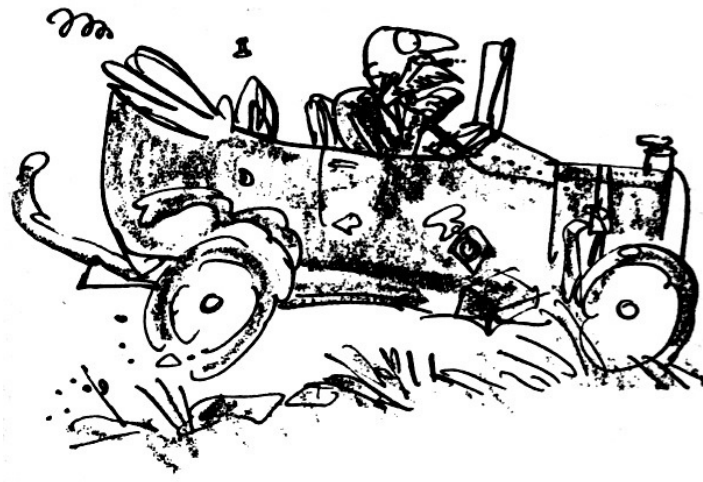
'Here he is again!' exclaimed Agaton Sax, smiling triumphantly as Anaxagoras Frank appeared on the horizon having accomplished his circular tour of the castle. The other cars were hard on his heels, the one in the lead almost scraping his rear wheels.

'This is our moment,' said Agaton Sax calmly. 'Shall we join in, gentlemen?'

Anaxagoras Frank made one last desperate attempt to throw off his pursuers. He drove his car straight off the road, hitting several concealed boulders on the way. First his front bumper fell off, then both his mudguards, and finally one of the front wheels rolled into the ditch. Gnashing his teeth with uncontrollable rage, he jumped out of the



car and attempted to get away



by leaping recklessly from car to car, but the other drivers, who were enraged by his scandalous conduct, immediately forgot all their prized Rally rules and, leaping out of their cars, joined enthusiastically in the headlong pursuit of the man who had for so long tried their patience to the limit with his shameless impertinence.

Agaton Sax watched this development from his own car with a growing sense of satisfaction. He had lit his Wednesday pipe (Agaton Sax had a special pipe for each day of the week)

and puffed at it slowly, nodding with approval as he watched Anaxagoras Frank being carried, or rather pushed, from shoulder to shoulder by the host of veteran car drivers, who were thoroughly enjoying this turn of events and no longer cared tuppence for the Rally. At last they got him, and handed him over to Inspector Lisington and the local superintendent of police, who snapped the handcuffs on him adroitly and told him that he had been put under arrest by the arm of the law—the British arm of the law. As soon as this satisfying ceremony was over, Agaton Sax explained what had happened to the assembled drivers and graciously rounded off his speech by calling for three cheers for the noble Veteran Car Rally.

Agaton Sax and Lord Woolverwoolton had some difficulty in explaining to the Earl's aunt, Lady Knixonbutton, why a foreigner had popped up so unexpectedly at the castle, trampling on her begonias with a steel shoe which, she maintained, had evidently been manufactured specially for the purpose. After one or two cups of tea she calmed down, and after the foreign gentleman had demonstrated his very considerable knowledge of English garden plants, even seemed to take rather a liking to him.

Andreas Kark had also shown himself to be a man of great courage and resourcefulness. Some hours earlier when the crooks had first arrived at the castle and decided to storm it in their search for Agaton Sax, they had bound Andreas Kark (their prisoner) hand and foot. However, he kept a collection of small but very efficient tools inside his steel shoe, and with the aid of these instruments he managed to free himself in about ten minutes, (it was at this point that he incurred the wrath of Lady Agatha, from which it was far harder to escape).

Agaton Sax was, naturally, the recipient of general praise and admiration. His good friend, the Brosnian Chief of Police, flew to England the following morning. He was anxious to thank Agaton Sax for his help in tracking down Anaxagoras Frank and his fellow conspirators, and also to apologise for the

unfortunate behaviour of his deputy; as soon as he arrived he was invited to the official banquet which Scotland Yard decided to give in honour of Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark.

The banquet was held the evening after the arrests, and it culminated in a surprise which was greeted by all those present with a storm of applause. Inspector Lispington had just sat down after making a long and solemn speech when a roll of drums roused the guests from their after-dinner drowsiness. As the rumble died away the great double-doors leading from the kitchen were flung open, and two uniformed headwaiters entered, wearing red and blue knitted Brosnian caps on their heads; behind them came more waiters, pushing a trolley bearing an enormous white cake—or rather, what the guests took to be an enormous white cake. It wasn't—it was a gigantic Brosnian galgomaï pudding, decorated all over with Brosnian flags and lit with forty candles.



Amid tumultuous applause the Brosnian Chief of Police (affectionately known as Old Goat Beard) rose to his feet and delivered a short, elegantly phrased speech, giving unstinted praise to Agaton Sax's extraordinary courage, skill, and judgement.

'And so, ladies and gentlemen,, he finished, if you will bear with me a moment longer, I have one more little surprise

before we all enjoy the galgomaï pudding I have brought from my country especially for your delight.'

So saying, he produced a little silver bell from one of his pockets, and shook it gently to and fro.

The guests waited eagerly; what would happen now? Then, to everyone's astonishment, a small door in the side of the galgomaï pudding opened, and out stepped a very pretty young girl who danced lightly across the floor to Agaton Sax, kissed him on both cheeks, and placed a little gold casket on the table in front of him.

She was the newly elected Galgomaï Pudding Queen.

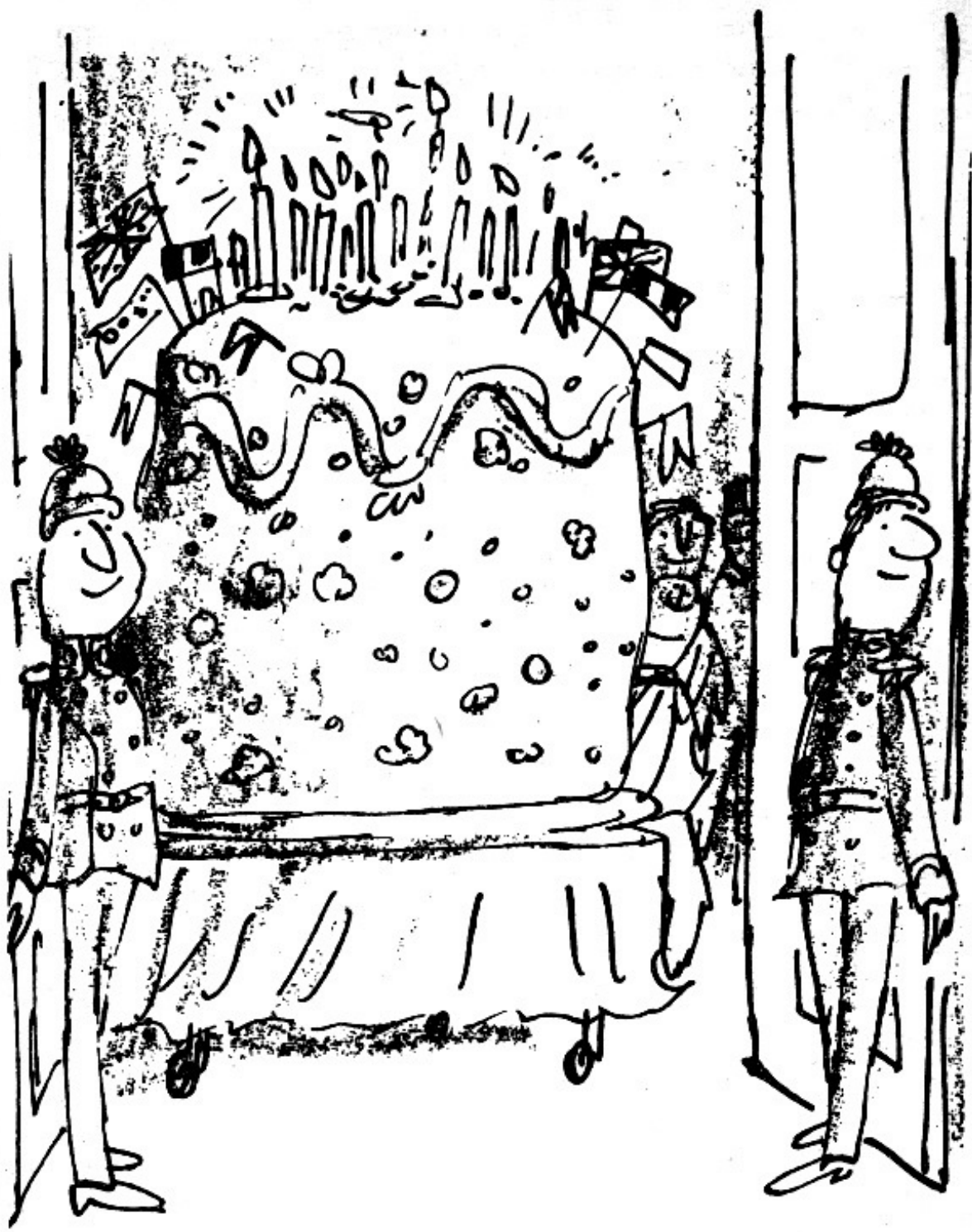
His round cheeks aflame with blushes, Agaton Sax stood up, returned the pretty girl's kisses, and then, with a wave of his hand, asked for silence. The cheers and clapping died down.

'Ladies and gentlemen...' he began, but his friend, Old Goat Beard, interrupted: 'My dear Agaton Sax, before you say anything, I must tell you and all the other guests what that little gold casket contains. You see, ladies and gentlemen, only two days ago a series of terrible blunders were made in my country. Our distinguished friend, Agaton Sax, was arrested and accused of committing certain crimes which were never named. Fortunately, he managed to escape from the prison where he was detained, and I can assure you, highly skilled professionals that you are, that his escape was perfectly planned and admirably carried out. At the same time, our eminent countryman, Mr Andreas Kark, was also wanted in connection with certain unspecified crimes, but he, too, managed to get away, knowing of course that he was quite innocent of any charges that might be brought against him. My Deputy issued rewards for the capture of Mr Sax and Mr Kark—quite substantial rewards, I may say. Now, Mr Sax and Mr Kark are here with us, at a dinner at New Scotland Yard, so it is clear that they have captured themselves. It is therefore my pleasant duty to present them with their rewards; one to Mr

Sax for arresting Mr Kark, and one to Mr Kark for arresting Mr Sax. In this way we shall be able to thwart my rather stingy colleague's arrangements for reducing the amount of the reward in the event of a double arrest. If our two distinguished friends will be good enough to open the small gold caskets in front of them, they will find their rewards inside, in genuine Brosnian currency.'

Unrestrained applause broke out as Old Goat Beard and Miss Galgamai Pudding embraced Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark, who were carried shoulder-high round the table by four stalwart police constables, especially selected for the honour.

Towards the end of this memorable banquet at Scotland Yard a telegram was delivered. It came from Anaxagoras Frank's most deadly rivals, a gang almost as dangerous as his own, and it congratulated Agaton Sax and Inspector Lispington on having removed a most aggravating competitor from the field of action.



Footnotes

To return to the text, click the blue number

- ¹ You can find out more about this particular Chief of Police if you read *Agaton Sax and the Scotland Yard Mystery*